

THE INTELLECTUAL LEGACY OF ABDUR RAZZAQ, AHMED SOFA, AND SALIMULLAH KHAN

Foundations, Formations, and the
Intellectual Cosmos of a Nation



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The Intellectual Legacy of Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan
Foundations, Formations, and the Intellectual Cosmos of a Nation

Author: S M Nazmuz Sakib

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General Editor's Preface

This textbook emerges from a recognition that the intellectual history of Bangladesh has been insufficiently systematized for an English-reading audience. The three figures at the center of this work, National Professor Abdur Razzaq, the writer-philosopher Ahmed Sofa, and the critical theorist Salimullah Khan, constitute a philosophical lineage that is not merely academic in nature. It is a lineage that shaped how a nation understood itself, how it argued about its own foundations, how it wrestled with the demons of colonialism, communalism, and authoritarian politics, and how it imagined futures that its institutional structures repeatedly failed to deliver. To study these three men is to study Bangladesh in its deepest registers: the registers of language, of selfhood, of collective memory, and of the enduring struggle between genuine thought and its simulation.

The textbook is organized into ten parts. Part One, which you are now reading, establishes the biographical, historical, philosophical, and contextual foundations necessary for everything that follows. It is the longest part by design, because foundations must be dug deep if the structure built upon them is to endure the weight of complexity that subsequent parts will impose.

PART ONE

FOUNDATIONS, FORMATIONS, AND THE INTELLECTUAL COSMOS OF A NATION

Origins, Biographies, Historical Context, and the Philosophy of Three Lives

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM OF THINKING IN BANGLADESH

1.1 Why Intellectual History Matters Here

To begin a textbook on the philosophy, politics, and intellectual lives of Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan, one must first confront a question that might seem basic but is actually tremendously difficult: why does intellectual history matter in a country like Bangladesh, a country whose dominant self-narratives have been shaped more by political

catastrophe, economic hardship, natural disaster, and military intervention than by the quiet labor of thinking men and women sitting in libraries and writing rooms?

The answer is that these are precisely the conditions under which intellectual labor becomes most urgently necessary, and most politically fraught. Where institutions are fragile, where constitutions are repeatedly suspended, where the state oscillates between civilian populism and military authoritarianism, where the economy reduces the majority of citizens to dependence, and where the educational system reproduces colonial hierarchies rather than dismantling them, the work of the intellectual becomes simultaneously more difficult and more indispensable. The thinker who can name what is happening, who can trace the deep structures beneath the surface turbulence of political events, who can connect the present crisis to the long history that produced it, and who can articulate an alternative vision of what a society might become, is performing a function that no government ministry, no political party, and no international development organization can adequately perform.

This is what Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan have collectively done across a span of more than seven decades. Their work, taken together, represents the most sustained and rigorous attempt in the history of Bangladesh to think through what Bangladesh actually is, how it came to be, what has gone wrong with it, and what it might yet become. The fact that this attempt has been conducted in conditions of political hostility, institutional indifference, economic marginalization, and social controversy only adds to its significance. Thought under pressure is a different kind of thought from thought in comfortable circumstances. It is harder, more urgent, more vulnerable, and potentially more transformative.

1.2 The Constellation and Its Internal Tensions

What makes the story of these three figures genuinely compelling, rather than merely instructive, is that they did not simply agree with each other. They were not a school in the sense of a unified movement with a shared program. They were a constellation, which is to say a group of distinct and powerful centers of intellectual light whose significance derives partly from their individual brilliance and partly from the tensions, affinities, conflicts, and productive misunderstandings among them.

Abdur Razzaq was the elder, the teacher of teachers, the man who never published a book of his own but whose thinking permeated the published work of generations of scholars and politicians. His method was oral, Socratic, and deliberately indirect. He taught not by lecturing in the conventional sense but by questioning, by recounting, by juxtaposing, by refusing to arrive at conclusions too quickly. His intellectual universe was vast and eclectic: it included Harold Laski and the British socialist tradition, the history of Muslim political thought in South Asia, Bengali literature, European philosophy, the economics of the Bengal delta, and the sociology of caste and community. But he never synthesized these diverse materials into a systematic treatise. He preferred to keep things in productive suspension, to let contradictions work on the minds of his students rather than resolving them prematurely.

Ahmed Sofa was Razzaq's most famous disciple and also, in some respects, his most severe critic. Where Razzaq was indirect and Socratic, Sofa was direct and prophetic. Where Razzaq

cultivated ambiguity, Sofa thrived on declaration. He was a man who said what he thought, in print and in public, with a ferocity that alienated many of his contemporaries and endeared him to a younger generation that was hungry for someone willing to name the compromises and corruptions of Bangladeshi intellectual and political life without flinching. Sofa's relationship with Razzaq was one of the most complex mentor-disciple relationships in Bengali intellectual history: deeply affectionate, intellectually transformative, and tinged with the inevitable tensions that arise when a brilliant student begins to develop an independent perspective that diverges from the teacher's.

Salimullah Khan, the youngest of the three, represents in some ways the synthesis and in other ways the rupture. He was introduced to the intellectual world of Dhaka by Ahmed Sofa, who brought him to meet Abdur Razzaq in 1976, when Khan was still a student. He thus came to the lineage as a disciple of a disciple, but the apprenticeship was not passive. Khan brought to the encounter a theoretical toolkit that neither Razzaq nor Sofa had fully developed: Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marxist political economy in its most rigorous forms, and the postcolonial critical theory that was being developed in the 1970s and 1980s by thinkers like Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and their successors. Khan has used this toolkit to reinterpret and extend the intellectual project of his predecessors, sometimes arguing with extraordinary force that Razzaq and Sofa were themselves products of intellectual formations they could not fully see, and that the work of genuine liberation requires going beyond them while honoring what they made possible.

The result is a three-generational intellectual drama of unusual richness: a drama in which ideas about Bangladesh's colonial past, its postcolonial present, its political failures, its cultural resources, its educational inadequacies, and its potential futures are debated with an intensity that few countries can match.

1.3 The Question of Relevance in 2025 and 2026

One might wonder whether figures like these, whose formative intellectual years belong to the middle decades of the twentieth century, have anything to say to the Bangladesh of the mid-2020s, a Bangladesh that has undergone the extraordinary political upheaval of 2024, that is navigating complex relationships with India and China, that is grappling with the consequences of decades of garment-industry-led development, and that is facing the existential threat of climate change in an especially acute form.

The answer is emphatically yes, and the reasoning is not merely sentimental. The problems that Abdur Razzaq identified in the 1950s, problems of dynastic politics, military interventionism, the failure of political parties to represent genuine popular interests, the concentration of power in elite networks disconnected from the majority of the population, remain structurally present in Bangladesh in 2026. The diagnosis that Ahmed Sofa offered in 1972, that Bangladeshi intellectuals were servile, opportunistic, and incapable of speaking truth to power, has not been rendered obsolete by the passage of time. The critique that Salimullah Khan has been developing for four decades, that Bangladesh's educational and cultural system reproduces a colonial hierarchy in which English-medium elites are positioned as inherently superior to Bengali-medium masses, has become if anything more urgent as the inequalities it describes have

deepened. In a December 2024 interview, Khan asserted that India seeks to keep Bangladesh in a position of dependency, arguing that narratives about the 1971 liberation war have been invoked to justify ongoing interference, a claim that has generated fierce debate in the context of Bangladesh's 2024 political transformation. [Grokopedia](#)

These are not merely historical arguments. They are active interventions in ongoing debates about what Bangladesh is and what it should become.

CHAPTER TWO: THE WORLD THAT MADE THEM

The Historical Context of Bengal, Bangladesh, and the Formation of an Intellectual Tradition

2.1 The Long History of the Bengal Delta

To understand the three figures who are the subject of this textbook, one must understand the geography, history, and sociology of the world into which they were born and within which they thought. That world is Bengal, and more specifically that part of Bengal which became East Pakistan in 1947 and Bangladesh in 1971. It is a world of extraordinary natural richness and human complexity, shaped by rivers and monsoons, by ancient trade routes and imperial conquests, by the interplay of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and syncretic religious traditions, and by the violent disruptions of colonialism, partition, and postcolonial nation-building.

The Bengal delta is one of the most fertile and densely populated river deltas in the world. For centuries it was a center of textile production, trade, and cultural efflorescence. Arab, Persian, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British traders sought its markets. The Mughal empire drew enormous revenues from Bengal. The British East India Company founded its Indian empire on the conquest of Bengal, beginning with the Battle of Plassey in 1757. The story of Bengal's incorporation into the British imperial system is thus the story of a transition from a position of economic and cultural centrality to one of subordination, dependence, and exploitation that took generations to fully internalize and centuries to begin to overcome.

This history of colonial subordination is the essential background for understanding why the intellectual work of Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan is preoccupied with questions of identity, dignity, and decolonization. These are not abstract philosophical concerns. They are the live concerns of people who inherited a world that had been profoundly shaped by conquest and who were trying to understand both the nature of that conquest and the possibilities for genuine independence.

2.2 The Bengal Partition of 1905 and Its Reversal

The first Bengal Partition of 1905, imposed by Lord Curzon, divided Bengal along a line that separated the predominantly Hindu western Bengal from the predominantly Muslim eastern Bengal. The partition was intended by the British to weaken the growing Bengali nationalist

movement, which was concentrated in Calcutta and dominated by educated Hindus. It had the unintended consequence of accelerating the development of a specifically Muslim Bengali political consciousness, as the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam provided a context in which Muslim landowners, professionals, and intellectuals could exercise greater political influence than in united Bengal. The partition was reversed in 1911, partly in response to massive Hindu-led protests, and its reversal generated bitterness in Muslim political circles that contributed directly to the eventual movement for Pakistan.

This episode is crucial for understanding the intellectual world of all three figures. The question of what Bengali Muslim identity is, where it comes from, what it requires, and what it means for the possibilities of political and cultural life in Bangladesh, runs through the entire intellectual legacy we are examining. Ahmed Sofa's most celebrated non-fiction work is directly addressed to this question. Abdur Razzaq's understanding of South Asian political development was shaped at its roots by his analysis of how Muslim political consciousness emerged and evolved in the subcontinent. And Salimullah Khan's entire intellectual project can be read as an attempt to think through what genuine decolonization would mean for a society whose identity is as complex as Bengali Muslim identity.

2.3 The Pakistan Movement, the Partition of 1947, and Its Aftermath

The creation of Pakistan in 1947 represented a decisive rupture in South Asian political history. For Bengali Muslims, it meant incorporation into a state defined by Islamic identity but dominated culturally, economically, and politically by West Pakistan. The cultural contradictions of this arrangement became apparent almost immediately. The imposition of Urdu as the sole official language of Pakistan was experienced by Bengali speakers, who constituted more than half the population of the new state, as an act of cultural aggression. The Language Movement of 1952, in which Bangladeshi students and intellectuals defended the right of Bengali to be recognized as an official language of Pakistan, sometimes at the cost of their lives, is the foundational event of Bangladeshi national consciousness.

Abdur Razzaq was a mature intellectual during this period, already teaching at the University of Dhaka, already developing the political analysis that would make him one of the most influential thinkers of his generation. He watched these events with the analytical eye of a scholar trained in political science and the passionate concern of a Bengali intellectual who understood what was at stake. His lectures and conversations of this period shaped the thinking of students who would go on to become major political figures, including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and major intellectuals, including Ahmed Sofa.

The period between 1947 and 1971 was one of gradual disillusionment with the Pakistan project among Bengali intellectuals and politicians. The economic exploitation of East Pakistan by West Pakistan, the political exclusion of Bengali voices from real power despite Bengali demographic majority, and the cultural suppression that accompanied these economic and political asymmetries all contributed to the development of a Bengali nationalist consciousness that would eventually demand full independence.

2.4 The Liberation War of 1971 and Its Philosophical Significance

The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 was not merely a military and political event. It was also a philosophical event of the first order. The war raised fundamental questions about justice, sovereignty, human dignity, and the foundations of political community that have continued to preoccupy Bangladeshi thinkers ever since.

The Pakistani military's response to the Bengali independence movement was a campaign of extraordinary violence. The army's Operation Searchlight, launched on the night of March 25, 1971, targeted intellectuals, students, and cultural figures with particular ferocity, in what critics have described as a deliberate attempt to destroy the intellectual and cultural leadership of Bengali Muslim society. The martyred intellectuals of December 14, 1971, killed in the final days of the war by the Pakistani army and its collaborators, have become iconic figures in Bangladeshi national consciousness.

Abdur Razzaq witnessed the March 1971 Dhaka University massacre. The Pakistanis came to arrest him at his home, but alerted by their kicking at his door, he escaped out the back. The Yahya Khan government subsequently sentenced him in absentia to a fourteen-year rigorous imprisonment, accusing him of treasonable acts. [Wikipedia](#) This personal experience of persecution and survival shaped his post-independence thinking in ways that are rarely fully appreciated. A man who has been sentenced to imprisonment in absentia for defending his nation's right to exist brings a particular intensity to questions about the relationship between knowledge, power, and political authority.

Ahmed Sofa's experience of the liberation war was documented in his later writings and contributed directly to the urgency of his 1972 work on Bangladeshi intellectualism. He was present in Calcutta during part of the war, among the refugees and freedom fighters, and the experience crystallized his sense that the liberation was not merely a national independence movement but a moral and philosophical revolution that required a corresponding revolution in intellectual and cultural life. The failure of this corresponding revolution, the ways in which independence produced not a new intellectual culture but a reconstituted opportunism in new political clothing, became the central concern of his early work in independent Bangladesh.

In his book *Behat Biplab*, Salimullah Khan analyzed the strategic and political aspects of the liberation war of Bangladesh, arguing that the three fundamental principles of the liberation war are equality, human dignity, and social justice. [Wikipedia](#) These three principles serve as a kind of philosophical touchstone for Khan's subsequent work, a standard against which the actual development of Bangladesh can always be measured and found wanting.

2.5 The Post-Independence Decades: Politics, Catastrophe, and Intellectual Disillusionment

The period following Bangladesh's independence in December 1971 was one of extraordinary political turbulence. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's government, which had led the independence movement, was initially constituted as a parliamentary democracy but rapidly moved toward authoritarian consolidation. The BAKSAL system established in 1975 abolished multi-party politics and concentrated power in a single party framework. In August 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated by a group of military officers in a coup that also killed most members of his family. A series of counter-coups followed, eventually bringing General Ziaur Rahman to

power. The period of 1975 to 1990 was dominated by military or quasi-military rule, punctuated by elections of varying credibility and legitimacy.

The return to parliamentary democracy in 1991 was followed by more than two decades of two-party dominance by the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, a dominance that critics including Salimullah Khan have characterized as a form of competitive oligarchy rather than genuine democratic governance. The constitutional crisis of 2006-2008, the military-backed caretaker government of 2007-2008, and the subsequent Awami League governments under Sheikh Hasina Wajed, who governed from 2009 through 2024, created conditions in which authoritarian tendencies gradually reasserted themselves within a nominally democratic framework.

The political upheaval of 2024, in which a mass student-led movement brought down Sheikh Hasina's government, represented a new moment of political possibility and uncertainty. Salimullah Khan, who had been one of the most prominent intellectual critics of the Hasina government's authoritarian tendencies while also supporting its predecessor, found himself in 2024 and 2025 navigating the complex politics of a new political landscape in which old alignments no longer applied. In 2025, following the Bangla Academy Literary Award ceremony, Khan complained publicly about what he described as the humiliation of awardees, suggesting that institutional recognition had not brought genuine respect. [Grokipedia](#)

This background of political instability, authoritarian recurrence, and institutional inadequacy is essential for understanding why the intellectual work of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has always been political work, even when it appears to be philosophical or literary.

2.6 The Bengali Language and Its Philosophical Weight

No discussion of the intellectual context of these three figures can be complete without a sustained account of the Bengali language and its philosophical significance. Language is not merely a medium of communication. It is, as Hegel argued and as every serious thinker in the tradition we are examining has understood, a medium of consciousness, a way of being in the world, a carrier of cultural memory, and a site of political struggle.

The Bengali language, one of the world's great literary languages, carries within it layers of history that extend back more than a thousand years. It is the language of Rabindranath Tagore, of Kazi Nazrul Islam, of Jasimuddin, of Lalon Shah, and of a vast and rich literary tradition. It is also, in the context of Bangladesh, the language in which the national liberation struggle was conducted, the language in which the martyrs of 1952 died defending the right to use their mother tongue, and the language in which the nation's foundational documents were written.

Yet it is also a language that has been systematically marginalized within Bangladesh's own institutional life. The dominance of English in higher education, the legal system, and elite professional culture represents, in Salimullah Khan's analysis, the continuation of colonial hierarchies under postcolonial conditions. Khan is a leading advocate for Bengali to be the main medium of education in Bangladesh's academia. He has argued that without establishing Bengali as the main medium of education at all stages, the decolonization process would lag behind, and

what he calls the Anglocentric colonial cringe would persist in the social dynamics of Bangladesh. [Wikipedia](#)

This is not a merely linguistic argument. It is a philosophical and political argument about what genuine independence means. A nation that gained political sovereignty in 1971 but continues to conduct its most important intellectual and professional activities in the language of the colonial power has achieved, in this analysis, only a partial and incomplete liberation.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL PROFESSOR ABDUR RAZZAQ

The Socrates of Dhaka and the Architecture of an Oral Philosophical Tradition

3.1 The Life of a Man Who Did Not Publish

Abdur Razzaq was born around 1914 in the village of Paragram in Nawabganj, Dacca district, Bengal Presidency. His father, Abdul Ali, was a police officer from Alinagar in Keraniganj. [Wikipedia](#) These biographical facts are deceptively simple. The world into which Razzaq was born was one in which the possibilities available to the son of a Bengali Muslim police officer were sharply constrained by the hierarchies of colonial society: racial hierarchies, religious hierarchies, educational hierarchies, and economic hierarchies all operated simultaneously and reinforced each other in ways that made upward mobility a difficult and often humiliating endeavor.

That Razzaq was able to pursue an academic career at all is testimony to the combination of personal brilliance, family sacrifice, and the peculiar opportunities that the University of Dhaka created for Bengali Muslim students who could navigate its demanding requirements. The University of Dhaka, founded in 1921 partly as a response to the reversal of the Bengal Partition and partly as an attempt to provide educational opportunities for the Muslim majority of eastern Bengal, was from its founding a site of intellectual and political ferment that played a central role in the development of both Pakistani nationalism and Bengali nationalism, often simultaneously and in ways that were only later seen to be contradictory.

Razzaq passed his Matriculation from the Government Muslim High School, Dhaka, and his Intermediate from Dhaka College before enrolling in the Department of Political Economy at Dhaka University in 1931. He passed his MA with first class honors in 1936 and joined as a lecturer in the same department the same year. [Banglapedia](#)

The fact that Razzaq joined as a lecturer immediately upon completing his MA, at the age of approximately twenty-two, is significant. He did not pursue a doctoral degree before entering academic life. His subsequent academic career would be defined not by the accumulation of formal credentials but by the depth and breadth of his reading, thinking, and teaching, a characteristic that is itself philosophically significant, suggesting a conception of scholarly life rooted in the continuous practice of inquiry rather than in the achievement of certified expertise.

3.2 The London School of Economics and the Harold Laski Connection

The most transformative formal educational experience of Razzaq's life was his study at the London School of Economics under Harold Laski. Laski was one of the most influential political theorists of the twentieth century, a brilliant socialist intellectual who taught at the LSE from 1920 until his death in 1950. His students included figures from across the political spectrum and from every part of the British Empire and beyond. Laski's particular contribution to political theory was his development of a form of pluralist democratic socialism that challenged both the Marxist emphasis on class struggle as the primary engine of political change and the liberal emphasis on individual rights as the foundation of political order. He argued instead for a conception of the state as one association among many, embedded in a complex network of social groups and institutions, and he believed that democratic socialism required the progressive expansion of economic and social rights alongside civil and political rights.

After the Second World War, Abdur Razzaq went to the UK to study under Laski at the London School of Economics, but chose to return home without obtaining any formal degree after Laski died in 1950. [Banglapedia](#) This is one of the most philosophically suggestive facts in Razzaq's biography. He went to London to work with a specific intellectual whose approach and personality he admired. When that person died, he did not seek a replacement supervisor, did not transfer to another university, did not attempt to complete a thesis under different auspices. He simply returned home, carrying the intellectual enrichment of his studies without the institutional certification that normally accompanies them.

It was said that Razzaq did not publish his thesis because he considered that except Laski, no one would be able to evaluate it adequately. [The Daily Star](#) Whether this represents intellectual pride, genuine assessment of available expertise, or a more complex combination of motivations is difficult to say. But it points to a deeply characteristic feature of Razzaq's intellectual personality: his refusal to submit to intellectual authority structures that he did not find genuinely authoritative. He was a deeply democratic thinker in his intellectual practice, willing to take ideas seriously from any source and from any person, but unwilling to grant formal structures of validation more authority than they deserved.

The Laski connection also explains certain persistent features of Razzaq's political thinking. His skepticism about centralized state power, his concern for decentralized and participatory democratic forms, his interest in the sociology of political parties and how they relate to the classes and communities they claim to represent, and his critical perspective on the relationship between formal constitutionalism and actual political power all bear the marks of Laski's influence. But Razzaq was never a simple Laskian. He brought to the Laskian framework the very different concerns of South Asian Muslim political thought, concerns about communalism, about the relationship between religious identity and political organization, about the specific forms of oppression that colonial rule imposed on Muslim communities in Bengal, and about what genuine self-determination would mean in a society as complex as Bengal.

3.3 The Art of Not Publishing: Razzaq's Oral Method

The most striking and philosophically significant feature of Abdur Razzaq's intellectual practice is that he did not publish. Though Razzaq, apart from some essays and lectures, has no published works, many intellectuals have admitted his influence on their published works. [Wikipedia](#) This is not simply an absence, a failure to do something that most academics do. It is itself a positive practice, a deliberate choice that reflects a particular understanding of what intellectual work is and how it should be conducted.

The comparison with Socrates is not merely honorific. Badruddin Umar once proposed calling him Bengal's Socrates, explaining that like Socrates, Razzaq did not write but spread knowledge by encouraging others to learn and think, and that his teaching method was also verbal. [The Daily Star](#) The Socratic parallel is philosophically instructive. Socrates refused to write because he believed that writing produces a false kind of knowledge: the knowledge of recognition, of being able to repeat something one has read, rather than the knowledge of genuine understanding, which can only develop through the living encounter between minds. Writing fixes thought in a form that cannot respond to questions, cannot adapt to the specific needs of a particular interlocutor, cannot grow in response to new evidence or new arguments. Oral teaching, by contrast, is always responsive, always alive to the particular situation and the particular student.

Razzaq seems to have shared something of this Socratic conviction. His lectures and conversations were not systematic presentations of a fixed doctrine. They were performances of intellectual inquiry, demonstrations of how to think, models of a kind of engagement with ideas that was simultaneously rigorous and flexible, deeply learned and genuinely open. Students left his presence not having received a set of conclusions but having experienced a mode of engagement that they then tried to replicate in their own work.

This explains why the influence of Razzaq on his students was so profound and so varied. Ahmed Sofa, Salimullah Khan, Humayun Ahmed, Humayun Azad, Sardar Fazlul Karim, Muntassir Mamoon, and many others who spent time in his company all became very different kinds of thinkers, pursuing very different kinds of intellectual projects. They were not disciples in the sense of followers of a master's established doctrine. They were students in the deeper sense: people who had been taught how to think and who then applied that ability in their own distinctive ways.

3.4 Bangladesh: State of the Nation

The one major lecture for which Abdur Razzaq is publicly known is his famous lecture "Bangladesh: State of the Nation," delivered in 1981. This lecture became the center of a significant intellectual controversy when the young Salimullah Khan wrote a book responding to and critiquing it, and when Ahmed Sofa in turn was critical of Khan's evaluation of Razzaq. The lecture thus generated a three-way philosophical debate that illuminates the internal dynamics of the intellectual tradition we are examining.

Razzaq's lecture offered a comprehensive analysis of Bangladesh's political, economic, and social condition a decade after independence. The analysis was characteristically layered and indirect. Rather than making straightforward programmatic arguments, Razzaq traced the

structural conditions that had produced Bangladesh's particular political pathologies: the weakness of civil society, the dominance of patron-client networks over programmatic political parties, the failure of the state to develop capacities for genuine public goods provision, and the tendency of political competition to take the form of factional struggles for access to state resources rather than debates about alternative visions of development.

Central to Razzaq's analysis was his understanding of what he called the ecological dimension of Bangladeshi political life. The Bengal delta's geography, its vulnerability to floods, droughts, and cyclones, its dependence on water management for agricultural productivity, and its historically developed patterns of small-scale agriculture and rural social organization, all created structural conditions that shaped political possibilities in ways that purely ideological analysis tended to miss. A politics adequate to Bangladesh, in Razzaq's view, had to be rooted in a genuine understanding of these ecological and social structural conditions, not merely imported from theoretical frameworks developed in very different contexts.

In his 1950 thesis *Political Parties in India*, he examined how colonial legacies fostered bureaucratic entrenchment in South Asian politics, limiting accountability and perpetuating elite control rather than responsive governance. He advocated prioritizing societal and popular power over rigid state structures, explicitly rejecting the centralized empowerment of political parties that stifled mass participation. [Grokopedia](#)

This anti-centralization tendency in Razzaq's thought is one of his most important intellectual contributions. At a time when both the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party were organizing themselves as highly centralized, hierarchical structures dependent on the personal authority of their leaders, Razzaq's insistence that genuine democratic governance required decentralized, participatory forms was both politically courageous and intellectually prescient. The political failures of subsequent decades, in which both parties demonstrated the destructive consequences of hierarchical, personalist politics, have repeatedly vindicated the analysis.

3.5 Razzaq and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: The Teacher-Student Relationship

The relationship between Abdur Razzaq and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is one of the most politically significant teacher-student relationships in South Asian history. It is claimed that Razzaq had as his students more than seventy members of parliament, among whom Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is the most notable. [Wikipedia](#) But the nature of Razzaq's influence on Mujibur Rahman is complex and requires careful analysis.

Mujibur Rahman was a student at the University of Dhaka in the late 1940s, during the period when Razzaq was developing his political analysis and when the Language Movement was beginning to take shape. He was not an exceptional student in the academic sense: his interests were political rather than scholarly, and he left the university without completing his degree when he was detained for political activities. But Razzaq's influence on him was nonetheless significant, operating not through academic instruction in the narrow sense but through the formation of political instincts and analytical habits.

The most important dimension of this influence was almost certainly Razzaq's analysis of the political economy of East-West Pakistan relations. Razzaq's understanding of how the structural inequalities between the two wings of Pakistan were deepening, and of why these inequalities were not merely accidental but were rooted in the fundamental architecture of the Pakistani state, provided an analytical framework that was influential in shaping Bengali political consciousness more broadly and that contributed to the development of the Six-Point Program that Mujibur Rahman articulated in 1966, the program that became the manifesto of Bengali autonomy and eventually of Bengali independence.

But Razzaq was also critical of the political direction that Mujibur Rahman's government took after independence. The establishment of the BAKSAL one-party system in 1975 was precisely the kind of centralized, authoritarian political consolidation that Razzaq's analysis had consistently warned against. The irony was profound: a student whose political development had been shaped by a teacher who deeply understood the dangers of political centralization proceeded, in power, to implement one of the most sweeping centralizations in the history of South Asian democracy.

3.6 The Political Parties in India: A Late-Published Work

One of the more remarkable developments in recent years has been the posthumous publication, in 2022, of Abdur Razzaq's thesis on Political Parties in India. This work, completed around 1950 but unpublished during Razzaq's lifetime, offers a systematic analysis of the Indian party system in the late colonial period and provides crucial context for understanding the political analysis that Razzaq communicated to his students through decades of oral teaching.

The publication of Political Parties in India in 2022, more than two decades after Razzaq's death, has prompted renewed scholarly interest in his intellectual contributions and has provided a textual basis for reconstructing arguments that previously existed only in the oral memory of his students and the secondary accounts of his biographers. [Grokopedia](#)

The work is significant for several reasons. First, it demonstrates that Razzaq did in fact have the capacity for systematic scholarly writing, which some accounts of his oral preference had suggested he lacked. The preference for oral teaching was therefore a positive choice, not a limitation. Second, it reveals the theoretical sophistication of his approach to political analysis, which drew on comparative political science, sociology, and political economy in ways that were genuinely innovative for the period. Third, it provides a textual anchor for debates about what Razzaq actually thought on specific questions, debates that have sometimes been distorted by the divergent memories of different students and disciples.

3.7 Razzaq's Personal Life and Philosophy of Simplicity

Biographical accounts of Abdur Razzaq consistently emphasize the simplicity and austerity of his personal life. Razzaq remained unmarried throughout his life. He always cooked his own food and used to invite his students to share his self-cooked meal. He lived an introverted life surrounded by books and disciples. [The Daily Star](#)

This personal simplicity is not incidental to his intellectual significance. It represents a philosophical commitment to a mode of life in which the accumulation of personal wealth and social status are subordinated to the pursuit of knowledge and the cultivation of human relationships rooted in intellectual engagement. In a society in which the dominant models of success involved the accumulation of social capital through networks of patronage and reciprocal obligation, Razzaq's austere independence was itself a form of political statement.

His acquisition of books was neither systematic nor agenda-driven. It reflected the imagination and inquisitiveness of a rich and restless mind with eclectic curiosities, aesthetic inclinations, cosmopolitan sensibilities, and the intellectual orientations provoked and sustained by the European Enlightenment project. [Abdur-razzaq-foundation](#)

The library that Razzaq built over his lifetime was itself a kind of philosophical project, a material embodiment of the conviction that knowledge is the most important thing a person can accumulate, and that genuine knowledge requires exposure to the full range of human intellectual endeavor across traditions, periods, and disciplines. The library included works in Oriental studies, history, philosophy, economics, political science, and literature, in Bengali, English, Urdu, Persian, and Arabic, representing the cosmopolitan intellectual range that Razzaq cultivated and embodied.

3.8 Razzaq's Political Philosophy: Key Themes

Several key themes emerge from a systematic reconstruction of Razzaq's political philosophy, drawing on his published essays, the accounts of his students and interlocutors, and the analysis provided by his published lecture and thesis.

The first theme is the critique of dynastic politics. On dynastic politics, Razzaq identified it as a persistent South Asian pathology that concentrated power within families, obstructing Westminster-style liberal democracy. [Grokopedia](#) This analysis proved deeply prescient in the context of Bangladesh, where politics came to be dominated by two families: the Sheikh family of the Awami League and the Zia family of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. The institutionalization of family-based political succession that Razzaq identified as a structural obstacle to genuine democracy has been repeatedly confirmed by subsequent events.

The second theme is the emphasis on ecological and geographical factors in political development. Razzaq's attention to the specific conditions of the Bengal delta, its hydrology, its agricultural patterns, its vulnerability to natural disasters, and its historically developed forms of social organization, represented an important corrective to purely ideological or institutional approaches to political analysis. He understood, in a way that many of his more theoretically sophisticated contemporaries did not, that political possibilities are always shaped by material conditions that cannot simply be wished away by the force of ideological commitment.

The third theme is the critique of intellectualism without responsibility. While this theme is most fully developed in Ahmed Sofa's work, its roots are clearly in Razzaq's teaching. Razzaq's consistent emphasis on the intellectual's responsibility to think honestly and speak truthfully, to resist the temptations of co-optation by political and institutional power, and to maintain the

independence that makes genuine intellectual contribution possible, was a theme that he communicated to his students through his own example as much as through explicit argument.

The fourth theme is the importance of tolerance and the dangers of ideological rigidity. Razzaq's political philosophy was deeply suspicious of any form of intellectual or political absolutism. He was skeptical of religious fundamentalism, of doctrinaire Marxism, of ethnic nationalism, and of any other system of thought that claimed to have all the answers and that was therefore closed to genuine inquiry. This tolerant, empiricist, genuinely pluralist orientation was perhaps the most important gift he transmitted to his students, even as they went on to develop very different and sometimes mutually opposed intellectual positions.

CHAPTER FOUR: AHMED SOFA

The Rebel Conscience, the Prophetic Voice, and the Mind of Bengali Muslim Society

4.1 Biography of a Bohemian Intellectual

Ahmed Sofa was born on 30 June 1943 in Gachbaria in the district of Chattogram, into a family of farmers. [Wikipedia](#) The contrast with Abdur Razzaq's relatively more urban and comparatively advantaged background is instructive. Sofa came from a rural, economically modest background in Chittagong, a port city that was culturally distinct from Dhaka, more commercially oriented, with a stronger tradition of sea-trade connections to the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and with a different texture of social and cultural life.

The circumstances of Sofa's early education were straightforward: he received his secondary and higher secondary education in Chittagong before moving to Dhaka to study at the University of Dhaka. Although he never paid much stress on formal education, he received his MA degree in political science and later did research work for a PhD, but he was not able to earn the degree. [Banglapedia](#) This is a biographical fact that is important to understand in its full complexity. Sofa's failure to complete his doctorate was not a simple failure of academic performance or application. It reflected a deeper tension between the kind of systematic institutional engagement that doctoral work requires and the bohemian, wide-ranging, and deliberately non-specialized intellectual life that Sofa was choosing to pursue.

Sofa was, from a very early stage, a writer in the fullest sense: a person for whom the activity of writing was not simply one professional activity among many but the central organizing practice of his life, the medium through which he engaged with the world, understood himself, and attempted to influence others. His writerly identity was more fundamental than his academic identity, and the two were in some tension throughout his career.

Ahmed Sofa led a very bohemian life. He was not committed and did not marry until his death. He was often criticized for having relations with several women. He led a quite isolated and miserable life despite his distinctive creativity. [Abiography](#) This personal dimension of Sofa's biography is relevant not merely as biographical curiosity but because it shaped both his

intellectual perspective and his public reputation. His refusal of conventional domestic arrangements, his restless and nomadic personal life, and his cultivation of friendships and intellectual relationships across social and artistic boundaries all contributed to the distinctive perspective from which he observed and analyzed Bangladeshi society.

Ahmed Sofa was a close friend of the famous Bengali painter SM Sultan. Both were bohemian in spirit, both remained unmarried and never pursued fame, fortune or other materialistic goals. Sofa himself expressed doubt whether two more such personalities could be found in a hundred years. [New Age](#) The friendship between Sofa and Sultan, two of the most uncompromising creative personalities in the history of independent Bangladesh, represents a fascinating intersection of literary and visual intellectual traditions. Sultan's radical celebration of the Bengal peasant as a figure of heroic physical power and spiritual dignity resonated with Sofa's own attempt to center the experience and perspective of ordinary Bengali Muslim society in his intellectual work.

4.2 The Formation of a Critical Consciousness

Sofa's intellectual formation was shaped by several overlapping influences. The first was his exposure to the Bengali literary tradition, particularly the radical and anti-colonial strands represented by figures like Kazi Nazrul Islam. Sofa is considered by many, including National Professor Abdur Razzaq and Salimullah Khan, to be the most important Bengali Muslim writer after Mir Mosharraf Hossain and Kazi Nazrul Islam. [Wikipedia](#) This positioning within a lineage is significant: Sofa understood himself as working within a tradition of Bengali Muslim intellectual and literary production that had its own distinctive history and concerns, a tradition that was neither reducible to the broader Bengali literary tradition dominated by Hindu writers from West Bengal nor to the Islamic religious tradition that some Muslim intellectuals saw as the proper framework for Bengali Muslim cultural life.

The second major influence was his relationship with Abdur Razzaq. Sofa met Razzaq as a student, and the encounter was transformative. Razzaq became Sofa's intellectual mentor in the fullest sense: the person who introduced him to the vast international literature of political theory, history, and social science that Razzaq had accumulated in his decades of reading and teaching, and who modeled an approach to intellectual engagement that combined rigorous analysis with genuine humanistic concern.

But the relationship was also characterized by tension and productive disagreement. Sofa was constitutionally incapable of intellectual deference, even to a figure he genuinely admired and loved. His book "Joddhopi Amar Guru" (Even Though My Teacher), which is the most sustained account of the Razzaq-Sofa relationship, is a remarkable document of the complicated dynamics between them: Sofa's profound admiration for Razzaq's intellectual range and personal integrity, combined with his frustration at Razzaq's indirectness, his reluctance to take political positions, and what Sofa experienced as a kind of Olympian detachment that was ill-suited to the urgencies of Bangladesh's political situation.

The third major influence was Sofa's direct experience of the Liberation War of 1971. He was deeply involved in the cultural and intellectual dimensions of the independence movement, and

the experience of war, massacre, refugee crisis, and eventual liberation gave his subsequent intellectual work an urgency and moral seriousness that distinguished it from more purely academic approaches to Bangladeshi social and political analysis.

4.3 Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas: The Prophetic Text of 1972

Ahmed Sofa's first major intellectual work in independent Bangladesh was "Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas" (A New Mode of Intellectualism), published in 1972 when he was twenty-nine years old. This work stands as one of the most extraordinary intellectual interventions in the history of Bangladeshi public discourse: a savage, unsparing critique of the intellectual class of Bangladesh, written in the immediate aftermath of liberation, at a moment when most intellectuals were celebrating the achievement of independence and positioning themselves to benefit from the new political order.

In *Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas*, Sofa mapped the intellectual landscape of Bangladesh, delineating the opportunistic tendencies of the intellectuals and their collaboration with the Establishment before and after the liberation of the country. Sofa condemned the intellectuals who live by their wits, play the intellectuals, and do everything for pure selfish reasons. He reminded intellectuals of their true responsibility in the newly independent country and warned about the grim future of fascism unless they performed their responsibility properly. Though today it is highly acclaimed for its prophetic insight into the future political and cultural prospect of Bangladesh, at the time Badruddin Umar commented that Sofa left the question of class unexplored. [New Age](#)

The force of this text lies in its combination of diagnosis and prophecy. Sofa was not merely describing a state of affairs that already existed. He was warning against a trajectory, arguing that the intellectual compromises being made in the immediate aftermath of independence would have long-term consequences for the health of Bangladeshi political and cultural life. The speed with which intellectuals who had aligned themselves with Pakistani cultural ideology during the 1960s realigned themselves with Bengali nationalism in 1971, and then aligned themselves with whichever political faction could provide patronage and protection in the post-independence period, was, in Sofa's view, not merely morally objectionable. It was analytically significant, revealing the depth of the structural problem he was identifying.

In his 1972 work *Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas*, Sofa accused Bangladeshi intellectuals of exhibiting servility, cowardice, and opportunism by aligning their writings with the interests of political and corporate powers, thereby compromising intellectual integrity for personal gain. He contended that this behavior not only impeded the nation's path to genuine independence but also ensured no radical societal restructuring, as intellectuals functioned more as beggars of ideas lacking originality rather than true thinkers challenging the status quo. [Grokopedia](#)

The phrase "beggars of ideas" is one of the most memorable and damning formulations in the history of Bangladeshi intellectual criticism. It captures something essential about a pattern that Sofa observed and that has continued to characterize significant segments of Bangladeshi intellectual life: the tendency to import intellectual frameworks from abroad, to apply them mechanically to local conditions, and to claim the authority of sophisticated theoretical

engagement while performing none of the original intellectual work that genuine theoretical engagement requires.

4.4 Bangali Musalmaner Man: The Mind of the Bengali Muslim

If "Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas" is Sofa's most politically incendiary work, "Bangali Musalmaner Man" (The Mind of the Bengali Muslim), published in 1981, is his most philosophically profound. This collection of nine essays, written over a period of twelve years, represents the most sustained and sophisticated attempt in the history of Bangladeshi intellectual thought to understand the distinctive formation of Bengali Muslim identity and consciousness.

The book is a highly acclaimed critical survey of the formation of Bengali Muslims' identity, the causes of their backwardness, their development as a community, and their intellectual progress. Anisuzzaman and many others consider it one of the greatest non-fiction books written in the Bengali language. [Wikipedia](#)

The central argument of the book is complex and has been subject to multiple interpretations, but its core can be summarized as follows. Bengali Muslims are the product of a distinctive historical formation in which Islamic religious identity and Bengali cultural identity have been in continuous tension and mutual transformation. The history of this formation includes the conversion of Buddhist and low-caste Hindu communities to Islam from the thirteenth century onward, the development of a syncretic folk religious culture that combined Islamic and pre-Islamic elements, the impact of reformist Islamic movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the experience of colonialism and the specific forms of discrimination and marginalization it imposed on Muslim communities in Bengal, and the political choices made during the Pakistan movement.

The result of this historical formation, in Sofa's analysis, is a community whose relationship to its own cultural identity is profoundly ambivalent. Bengali Muslims are neither fully at home in the Islamic intellectual and cultural tradition, because their Islam has always been inflected by Bengali linguistic and cultural forms, nor fully at home in the Bengali literary and cultural tradition, because that tradition has been dominated by Hindu writers and has often marginalized or stereotyped Muslim experience. Sofa contended that Bengali Muslim society harbors the greatest fear of independent thought, rooted in a pervasive inferiority complex that impedes linguistic and cultural advancement. [Grokopedia](#)

This diagnosis has been both celebrated and contested. Celebrated because it names with unusual precision a psychological and cultural formation that many Bengali Muslims have privately recognized in themselves and their communities. Contested because the diagnosis can be read as confirming rather than challenging the very inferiority complex it describes, because it can be used to blame Bengali Muslims for their own subordination rather than analyzing the structural conditions that produced it, and because the concept of "the mind of the Bengali Muslim" risks reifying a diverse and internally differentiated community into a single psychological type.

Sofa was aware of these objections and addressed some of them in the text itself. His goal was not to produce a simple narrative of cultural deficiency but to analyze the specific historical

conditions that had produced particular patterns of consciousness, with the understanding that a clear-eyed diagnosis of those conditions was the necessary starting point for any project of genuine cultural transformation.

4.5 Razzaq's Assessment and the Controversy Over Sofa's Work

National Professor Abdur Razzaq's assessment of Sofa's work is itself a fascinating dimension of the intellectual tradition we are examining. Razzaq is reported to have described Sofa's work as "a treasure trove for Bengali literature," a phrase that conveys both admiration and a particular framing: it positions Sofa primarily as a literary rather than a political or philosophical figure, which is not quite how Sofa understood himself.

There is also the more complex question of Razzaq's response to Sofa's portrayal of him in "Joddhopi Amar Guru." This book, which combines biography, intellectual history, and personal memoir, is at once a tribute to Razzaq and a subtle critique of certain aspects of his intellectual personality. Sofa presents Razzaq as a figure of towering intellectual distinction whose potential influence was limited by his cultivation of indirectness, his refusal to publish, and his preference for a kind of Olympian wisdom over engaged political commitment. Razzaq's response to this portrayal was characteristically indirect: he is reported to have made comments that were simultaneously appreciative of Sofa's literary gifts and gently dismissive of some of his specific arguments, without ever engaging in explicit public debate.

This pattern of mutual appreciation combined with partially suppressed disagreement is characteristic of the broader relationship between the three figures. There is a kind of intellectual loyalty that prevents full-scale public confrontation, combined with an honesty that prevents simple agreement. The result is a more interesting and more productive intellectual dynamic than either pure discipleship or simple opposition would produce.

4.6 Sofa's Political Writings and His Relationship to Political Power

Ahmed Sofa's political writings cover a wide range of subjects: the Liberation War and its aftermath, the failures of successive Bangladeshi governments, the role of the military in political life, the question of relations with India, the problem of communalism and religious extremism, and the broader question of what kind of polity Bangladesh should become.

What distinguishes these writings from typical political journalism is their combination of historical depth, analytical rigor, and moral passion. Sofa was not content to describe political events; he wanted to understand their structural causes and their long-term significance. And he was not content to analyze without also prescribing: his political writing always had a normative dimension, a concern not just with what Bangladesh was but with what it should be.

His relationship with political power was one of principled distance. Never to be co-opted by the establishment, Sofa rejected Lekhak Shibir Award in 1975 and the Sa'dat Ali Akanda Award offered by Bangla Academy in 1993. [Wikipedia](#) These refusals were not merely gestures of personal integrity. They were political statements, demonstrations that genuine intellectual

independence required the refusal of institutional recognition from establishments whose integrity Sofa questioned.

This stance made Sofa a figure of admiration for those who valued intellectual independence and a figure of irritation and sometimes hostility for those who felt his refusals were self-righteous or counterproductive. The tension between the desire for intellectual independence and the practical need for institutional resources to sustain intellectual work is a tension that runs through the history of all three figures, and it has no simple resolution.

4.7 Sofa's Literary Works: Novels, Poetry, and the Art of Moral Fiction

While this textbook is primarily concerned with Sofa's intellectual and philosophical significance, his literary works are an indispensable dimension of his overall contribution and cannot be treated as merely supplementary.

Among Sofa's novels, his work *Omkar* (The Om, 1975) is seen as a great story about the liberation movement of Bangladesh. *Gabhi Bittanta* (A Tale of a Cow, 1995) is a satirical novel that makes fun of how teachers get involved in politics at the University of Dhaka, used as a reference when discussing university politics in Bangladesh. *Pushpa Briksa ebang Bihanga Puran* (Tales of Flowers, Trees, and Birds, 1996) shows Sofa's deep love for nature. [Kiddle](#)

"*Gabhi Bittanta*" deserves special attention as perhaps the most significant political novel in the history of Bangladeshi literature. The novel satirizes the political culture of Dhaka University through the story of a cow that becomes the center of a complex web of academic intrigue, political maneuvering, and personal corruption. The choice of a cow as the central narrative device is not merely whimsical: it is a philosophically significant choice that allows Sofa to defamiliarize the university's political culture, making visible its absurdity and moral bankruptcy through the innocent and literal perspective of an animal that does not understand the human games being played around it.

Gabi Bittanta is considered to be the most powerful novel in Bengali language, especially written in the context of teachers' monopolies in the universities of Bangladesh. In this novel, Sofa says in a sharply sarcastic way: "The oldest and most prestigious university of our country has taken such a termagant look in recent times, it is not at all safe to live here with one's honour intact." [New Age](#)

The literary significance of this novel extends beyond its satirical function. It represents an attempt to use narrative fiction as a form of social and philosophical analysis, to explore through the concrete particularity of human behavior in specific situations the general truths about power, corruption, self-deception, and moral cowardice that more abstract analysis can only describe in general terms. This use of fiction as philosophy, as a way of knowing about human reality that complements and in some respects exceeds purely analytical approaches, is one of Sofa's most significant intellectual contributions.

4.8 The Final Years and the Legacy of Ahmed Sofa

Ahmed Sofa died on July 28, 2001, in a hospital in Dhaka, at the age of fifty-eight. He was buried in the Martyred Intellectuals' Graveyard. [Wikipedia](#) The decision to bury him there, among the intellectuals who were killed in 1971 for their commitment to Bengali culture and Bangladeshi independence, was a recognition of his status as one of the defining intellectual voices of his generation and of his country.

With the death of Ahmed Sofa, Bangladesh lost not simply one of its most original thinkers. It also marked the passing of an age. [The Daily Star](#) This observation by Salimullah Khan, written in the aftermath of Sofa's death, captures something important about what Sofa represented. He was not merely an exceptional individual thinker. He was the embodiment of a particular kind of intellectual life, the life of the uncompromising, independent, truth-speaking intellectual who refuses all the ordinary accommodations that social and political life demands, and who pays the price for that refusal in isolation, poverty, and institutional marginalization.

The legacy of Ahmed Sofa is immense and continues to grow. His writings have maintained relevance in Bangladeshi intellectual circles, with post-2001 scholarly discussions highlighting his contributions to rationalist critiques of societal norms. Analyses of his essay *Bangali Musalmaner Mon* in 2025 publications underscore its enduring examination of cultural limitations and elite influences, influencing ongoing debates on independent thought. [Grokopedia](#)

The "Ahmed Sofa Rastroshobha" (State Forum) established in his memory continues to organize annual lectures, debates, and cultural events in his honor, ensuring that his ideas remain in active circulation rather than becoming merely historical artifacts. Salimullah Khan's editorial work in compiling and publishing collections of Sofa's writings has been central to this process of canonization and continuing intellectual engagement.

CHAPTER FIVE: SALIMULLAH KHAN

The Bridge Between Generations, the Lacanian-Marxist, and the Project of Decolonization

5.1 Birth, Background, and Early Formation

Salimullah Khan was born on 18 August 1958 into a Bengali Muslim family in Cox's Bazar district and grew up in Maheshkhali. He passed his SSC from Chattogram Cantonment High School and HSC from Chattogram College. He studied law at the University of Dhaka. [Wikipedia](#)

Cox's Bazar and Maheshkhali are in many ways an appropriate geographical starting point for the intellectual journey that Khan would undertake. Cox's Bazar is Bangladesh's most important coastal city, a site of ancient commercial and cultural exchange, and in more recent decades, a site of profound humanitarian crisis as it has become home to one of the world's largest refugee populations, the Rohingya who have fled persecution in Myanmar. The region's position as a borderland, a place where different cultural and commercial currents meet and interact, resonates

with Khan's subsequent intellectual development as a thinker who consistently works at the intersections of different intellectual traditions.

The Cantonment High School background is worth noting. Military cantonment schools in Bangladesh have historically provided high-quality education within a disciplined environment. This particular educational context, which combined academic rigor with a specific kind of institutional order, is an interesting background for a thinker who would go on to become one of the most searching critics of the social order that such institutions reproduce.

The decision to study law at the University of Dhaka, rather than pursuing the humanities or social sciences directly, reflects a pragmatic calculation about professional possibilities. But the law faculty at Dhaka University during this period was also a significant intellectual environment, particularly for students interested in political thought and social theory. Khan's legal training would later contribute to the distinctive analytical precision that characterizes his theoretical work, even as he moved well beyond the boundaries of legal analysis into political theory, psychoanalysis, and cultural criticism.

5.2 The Encounter with Ahmed Sofa and Abdur Razzaq

The pivotal event in Salimullah Khan's intellectual formation was his encounter with Ahmed Sofa in 1976. In 1976, while a student, Salimullah Khan met noted intellectual Ahmed Sofa. Sofa introduced him to Professor Abdur Razzaq. [Tritiyomatra](#)

The importance of this encounter cannot be overstated. Khan arrived at the intellectual world of Dhaka as a young student from a provincial coastal background, without the social connections and cultural capital that typically facilitated entry into the city's elite intellectual circles. Sofa's decision to take him seriously, to engage with him as an intellectual interlocutor rather than merely a young admirer, and to introduce him to Razzaq, represented a form of intellectual sponsorship that opened doors that would otherwise have remained closed.

The triangle formed by these three encounters, Khan learning from Sofa, Sofa having learned from Razzaq, and Khan then also engaging directly with Razzaq, created the intellectual genealogy that defines the tradition we are examining. But it is important to emphasize that Khan was not passive in this relationship. He came to it with his own intellectual formation already in progress, with a particular set of questions and concerns that he was developing through his own reading and thinking. The encounter with Sofa and Razzaq provided context, enrichment, and orientation, but it did not simply determine Khan's intellectual direction.

Khan's first book "Bangladesh: Jatiyo Obosthar Chalchitro" (1983) was a critique of Abdur Razzaq's famous lecture, Bangladesh: State of the Nation. Ahmed Sofa was critical of Khan's evaluation of Razzaq. [Alchetron](#) This early triangular disagreement, in which Khan challenged the master's analysis and in turn was challenged by the master's primary disciple, established a pattern of intellectual engagement that has characterized Khan's work ever since: rigorous, independent, willing to challenge even figures he deeply respects, and always oriented toward the underlying question of what genuine intellectual honesty requires.

5.3 The American Education and the New Theoretical Toolkit

Salimullah Khan holds a PhD in Economics from the New School for Social Research, New York. He also holds LL.M. and LL.B. (Hons.) degrees conferred by Dhaka University. He taught at Rajshahi University (1983-84) and Dhaka University (1984-86) before moving to the United States in 1986. In the US he taught at several colleges including the State University of New York at Purchase (1988-89) and the City University of New York (1993-1998). After his return to Bangladesh in 2000, he taught at several institutions before his current appointment at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh in 2012. [University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh](#)

The New School for Social Research is one of the most distinctive intellectual environments in American higher education. Founded in 1919 as a refuge for progressive and radical intellectuals, and reconstituted during the 1930s as a haven for European scholars fleeing Nazism, the New School has a distinctive intellectual culture that emphasizes critical theory, heterodox economics, and interdisciplinary social science. The PhD program in Economics there was at the time when Khan studied it especially strong in political economy, the history of economic thought, and the theoretical foundations of economics, as distinct from the mathematical formalism that dominated mainstream economics departments.

This educational environment exposed Khan to a range of theoretical resources that were not widely available in Bangladesh: post-Keynesian economics, Marxist political economy, the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, and the psychoanalytic social theory that was being developed at the time through the encounter between Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist social analysis. Khan absorbed all of these influences and brought them back to Bangladesh as part of a project of intellectual enrichment that, he argued, was necessary for the development of a genuinely rigorous and independently grounded Bangladeshi intellectual tradition.

The Lacanian dimension of Khan's theoretical toolkit deserves particular attention, because it is the dimension that is most unfamiliar to most readers and that has been most controversial in the Bangladeshi intellectual context. Jacques Lacan was a French psychoanalyst and theorist whose reinterpretation of Freud through the lens of structural linguistics produced one of the most difficult and disputed bodies of theory in twentieth-century intellectual life. Lacan's central claim is that the unconscious is structured like a language, that the subject of desire is always a split subject whose self-understanding is constituted through misrecognition, and that the relationship between language, desire, and social order is far more complex and intimate than either Freudian or Marxist traditions had fully grasped.

Since 1997, Khan's engagement with Freud and Lacan has made him use psychoanalysis to explore Bangladesh's politics and culture. He wrote two books on Freud-Lacanian philosophy: *Freud Porar Bhumika* and *Ami Tumi She*. [Wikipedia](#)

The application of Lacanian psychoanalysis to the analysis of Bangladeshi politics and culture is one of Khan's most original intellectual contributions. It allows him to ask questions about the structure of political subjectivity in Bangladesh, about how Bangladeshi political actors understand themselves and their relationships to power, about the role of fantasy and

misrecognition in the reproduction of political hierarchies, and about what genuine political transformation would require at the level of subjective formation and not merely institutional rearrangement. These are questions that neither the political science tradition nor the Marxist tradition, taken independently, is well equipped to answer.

5.4 Khan's Political Philosophy: Anti-Colonialism and the Critique of Westernism

The overarching framework of Salimullah Khan's political philosophy is an anti-colonial Marxism, inflected by Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, postcolonial criticism, and a deep engagement with the specific history and cultural resources of Bengali and Bangladeshi society.

A proponent of anti-colonial movements, Khan has engagements in the regional political economy and culture from a Lacanian-Marxist perspective. A critic of Western interventionism, Khan analyzes Western thought and discourse through critical scrutiny of the colonial and imperial legacy of the West. From this perspective, he has written on the works of Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Frantz Fanon, Claude Levi-Strauss, Edward Said, Aime Cesaire, Talal Asad, and many others. [Wikipedia](#)

This engagement with Western critical theory is not an uncritical adoption of a foreign framework. It is a selective and often critical engagement, in which Khan takes from the Western critical tradition what he finds genuinely useful for the analysis of Bangladeshi conditions while insisting on the inadequacy of any approach that treats the Western experience as universal or normative. His reading of Fanon is particularly important in this regard: Fanon's analysis of the psychological dimensions of colonial oppression, the ways in which colonialism damages the consciousness of the colonized as well as the colonizer, and the conditions required for genuine decolonization, resonates deeply with Khan's analysis of Bangladeshi intellectual and cultural life.

The critique of Western interventionism is a consistent theme in Khan's work. Khan has repeatedly accused India of harboring colonial ambitions toward Bangladesh, framing its regional dominance as an extension of historical hegemony rather than benevolent aid. In a December 3, 2024 interview, Khan asserted that India wants to keep Bangladesh as its colony using the excuse of its helping the country in its war of liberation in 1971. [Grokopedia](#)

This is a controversial position that has generated fierce debate, and it requires careful engagement. Khan's argument is not simply that India is a bad neighbor or that its government has malign intentions. It is a structural argument about the ways in which the unequal power relationship between India and Bangladesh creates conditions in which Indian interests tend to dominate at the expense of Bangladeshi ones, regardless of the subjective intentions of individual actors. The invocation of the 1971 liberation as a permanent basis for Bangladeshi deference to Indian interests is, in Khan's analysis, a narrative of dependency that serves Indian strategic interests while undermining Bangladeshi sovereignty.

This analysis has taken on particular urgency in the context of the 2024 political changes in Bangladesh, when the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government, which had been closely aligned with Indian interests, created both new opportunities and new anxieties about the shape of

Bangladesh-India relations. Khan's consistent arguments about the need for Bangladesh to develop a more genuinely independent foreign policy, rooted in its own national interests and not structured by the gratitude narrative of 1971, have provided an intellectual framework within which these new political developments can be understood.

5.5 The Language Question: Bengali as Political Philosophy

The campaign for Bengali as the primary medium of education and official communication in Bangladesh is arguably the most practically significant dimension of Salimullah Khan's public intellectual work. This is not merely a linguistic or cultural argument. It is a comprehensive critique of the colonial-era hierarchies that continue to structure Bangladeshi society, an analysis of the mechanisms by which elite power is reproduced through language, and a proposal for a form of genuine decolonization that addresses cultural and psychological dimensions of subordination alongside economic and political ones.

Khan is a leading advocate of Bengali to be the main medium of education in the Bangladeshi academia. He has argued that without establishing Bengali as the main medium of education at all stages, the decolonization process would lag behind, and the Anglocentric colonial cringe would persist in the social dynamics of Bangladesh. He noted that the ruling class, while admitting Bengali to be the state language, reveals its preference for English in its actual language application. Citing Freud and Lacan, he wrote that people of the ruling class are perverse, since their acts and thoughts do not reflect their words. [Wikipedia](#)

The use of Lacanian psychoanalytic categories to analyze the language politics of the Bangladeshi ruling class is a characteristic instance of Khan's theoretical method. The term "perverse" in Lacanian theory does not carry its ordinary moral sense. It refers to a specific structure of desire and knowledge in which the subject knows the truth but acts in denial of it, maintaining a split between official acknowledgment and actual behavior. The ruling class's official celebration of Bengali as the national language combined with its actual preference for English in all high-status contexts is, in this analysis, not simply hypocrisy in the ordinary sense but a structured psychological formation that reproduces itself because it serves the material interests of those who maintain it.

At a December 2024 conference on language evolution, Khan reiterated the need to prioritize the mother tongue for inclusive accessibility, praising initiatives that align with this principle. On April 12, 2025, he lamented the marginalization of Bengali-medium institutions, noting their relegation to second- or third-tier status amid the rise of English-medium alternatives, and linking this trend to systemic devaluation that hinders equitable access to civil service examinations like the BCS, where Bengali-medium graduates compete at a disadvantage. [Grokopedia](#)

This argument connects the language question to the broader question of social justice and equal access to opportunities. The hierarchy that places English-medium education above Bengali-medium education is not neutral. It advantages the children of the elite who can afford English-medium schools and disadvantages the children of ordinary families who attend Bengali-medium institutions. The consequence is that the civil service, the legal profession, the business world,

and other high-status professional domains remain accessible primarily to those who have the economic resources to acquire English-medium education, thereby reproducing elite power across generations in a way that formal democracy does nothing to disrupt.

5.6 Khan's Reception: Awards, Controversies, and Institutional Frictions

The reception of Salimullah Khan's work in Bangladesh has been, to use his own analytical vocabulary, characterized by a profound ambivalence. He is widely recognized as one of Bangladesh's most significant public intellectuals, sought out for television interviews and public lectures, cited in academic and journalistic discussions of political and cultural questions, and celebrated as a figure of unusual intellectual courage and analytical depth. At the same time, his positions frequently generate controversy, his institutional career has been marked by tensions and conflicts, and his uncompromising intellectual independence has made him enemies in positions of institutional power.

Reception remains polarized: hailed for intellectual depth in academic and media circles, while facing institutional friction, exemplified by his 2025 complaints of humiliation following the Bangla Academy Literary Award ceremony, where awardees were allegedly treated subserviently. [Grokopedia](#)

The Bangla Academy Award of 2024 and the controversy surrounding its ceremony in 2025 is a particularly revealing instance of the tensions between Khan's public status and his institutional situation. Bangla Academy is Bangladesh's official literary and cultural institution, responsible for promoting the Bengali language and literature and for recognizing outstanding contributors to the national cultural life. Its literary award is one of the highest honors in the Bangladeshi cultural world. Khan's receipt of this award represents official recognition of his extraordinary contributions to Bangladeshi intellectual life. But his public complaint about the way the awardees were treated at the ceremony, his suggestion that the institution's treatment of its own honorees was disrespectful, reflects the characteristic tension between the desire for recognition and the refusal to accept recognition on terms that imply subordination.

This tension is itself philosophically significant. The intellectual who accepts awards from institutions he criticizes, but refuses to accept the implicit terms of deference that institutional recognition normally entails, is navigating a genuine dilemma about the relationship between individual integrity and social engagement. Khan's resolution of this dilemma, to accept recognition while continuing to speak truth about the institutions that provide it, is characteristic of his intellectual personality and is consistent with the broader tradition of engaged independence that goes back through Sofa to Razzaq.

5.7 Khan's Engagement with the 2024 Political Changes in Bangladesh

The political upheaval of 2024, in which a student-led movement succeeded in bringing down the long-serving government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed, created a new political context to which Salimullah Khan has responded with characteristic analytical energy. The movement, which drew on the frustrations of a generation that had grown up under an increasingly authoritarian system and that demanded genuine democratic accountability,

resonated in many ways with the principles that Khan had been articulating throughout his intellectual career: equality, human dignity, and social justice as the fundamental principles of the Bangladeshi political project.

At the same time, the political complexity of the post-2024 situation has posed analytical challenges for Khan. The coalition of forces that brought down the Hasina government includes elements whose values and orientations differ sharply from Khan's own: conservative Islamic forces, nationalist movements whose relationship to the liberation war's founding principles is ambiguous, and political actors whose commitment to the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice is uncertain. Navigating this complex new landscape while maintaining analytical clarity and intellectual integrity requires exactly the combination of theoretical sophistication and moral courage that Khan's intellectual career has been developing.

Khan's comments on the events of 2024 have been closely followed by academic and media circles, and his analysis of the structural conditions that produced the upheaval, and of what would be required for the new political situation to represent genuine progress rather than merely a change of elite personnel, has provided an important intellectual framework for understanding the significance of the changes. [Grokipedia](#)

CHAPTER SIX: THE TRIANGLE

Internal Relationships, Intellectual Debts, Productive Conflicts, and Conspiracies of Influence

6.1 The Structure of the Intellectual Triangle

The relationship among Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan is not simply a linear succession, a straightforward transmission from teacher to disciple to disciple of disciple. It is a more complex, three-dimensional structure in which the relationships are multiple, bidirectional, and characterized by tensions as well as affinities.

The Razzaq-Sofa relationship is the most foundational. It is a relationship of extraordinary intensity, combining intellectual mentorship, personal affection, and genuine disagreement. Sofa learned more from Razzaq than from any other single person, and acknowledged this learning in both public tribute and private acknowledgment. But he also developed an intellectual position that, in crucial respects, departed from Razzaq's approach, emphasizing directness over indirectness, declaration over Socratic questioning, and political engagement over scholarly detachment.

The Razzaq-Khan relationship was mediated by Sofa: Sofa introduced Khan to Razzaq, and the context in which Khan encountered Razzaq was therefore partly determined by Sofa's own interpretation and framing of who Razzaq was and what his significance was. This mediation means that Khan's understanding of Razzaq is never purely direct but is always partly refracted

through Sofa's perspective, which creates interpretive complexities that have generated ongoing scholarly debate.

The Sofa-Khan relationship was in some ways the most complex and most intellectually generative of the three. Sofa was Khan's primary intellectual mentor during his formative years, and Khan's intellectual development was shaped in its earliest stages by Sofa's example and guidance. But Khan also brought to the relationship a theoretical toolkit, particularly the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, that Sofa found unfamiliar and in some respects uncongenial. The productive tension between Sofa's emphasis on direct political and cultural analysis and Khan's psychoanalytically inflected approach to similar questions runs through much of Khan's work.

6.2 The Controversy Over Bangladesh: State of the Nation

The controversy surrounding Razzaq's famous lecture "Bangladesh: State of the Nation" and the responses it generated from both Khan and Sofa is one of the most instructive episodes in the intellectual history of Bangladesh. It illustrates not only the substantive disagreements among the three figures but also the interpersonal dynamics and the underlying stakes of the intellectual contest.

Khan's critique of Razzaq's lecture, published as his first book in 1983, engaged with the substance of Razzaq's analysis while also implicitly challenging the indirectness and inconclusiveness that he saw as a limitation of Razzaq's method. Khan's version of the argument was more systematic, more explicitly theoretical, and more politically pointed than Razzaq's own formulation. He took what Razzaq had communicated as a series of suggestive observations and wove them into a more coherent analytical framework, inevitably introducing his own interpretive choices in the process.

Sofa's critical response to Khan's reading of Razzaq was complex. On one level, it reflected a protective loyalty to Razzaq, a sense that Khan had not fully grasped the significance of what Razzaq was doing in his deliberately indirect way. On another level, it reflected Sofa's own interpretive position on the questions that Razzaq's lecture addressed, a position that differed from both Razzaq's original and Khan's reinterpretation.

This three-way debate is philosophically significant because it illustrates the way in which a single text, or in Razzaq's case a single lecture, can generate multiple incompatible interpretations, each of which is in some sense faithful to the original while each of which also projects the interpreter's own concerns and orientations onto the material. The question of what Razzaq "really meant" is not one that admits of a simple answer, because Razzaq's deliberately indeterminate style was designed to generate exactly this kind of productive interpretive plurality.

6.3 Intellectual Debts and Their Acknowledgment

The question of intellectual debt is philosophically and personally complex. Acknowledging intellectual debts requires a kind of intellectual humility that is in tension with the need to assert

one's own originality and independence. The three figures handle this tension in characteristically different ways.

Razzaq's debts are primarily to the Western political theory tradition, to Laski above all, but also to the broader traditions of liberal and socialist political philosophy. He acknowledges these debts implicitly through his engagement with the texts and through his recommendation of them to his students, but he does not typically foreground his intellectual lineage in the self-conscious way that academic writing in Western conventions demands.

Sofa acknowledges his debt to Razzaq explicitly and movingly in "Joddhopi Amar Guru," while also insisting on his own intellectual independence and his right to disagree with and criticize Razzaq where he sees fit. His debts to the Western literary and philosophical tradition are acknowledged through his engagement with the specific texts and thinkers that informed his work, but he characteristically reads these texts through a Bengali and specifically Bengali Muslim lens that transforms them in the process.

Khan is the most explicit of the three in acknowledging his intellectual debts, partly because his theoretical framework is more systematically derived from identifiable Western thinkers, and partly because the conventions of the academic contexts in which he has worked require explicit citation of intellectual sources. His acknowledgment of Sofa's influence is particularly fulsome and generous, positioning Sofa as the primary inspiration for his engagement with Bangladeshi political and cultural questions.

6.4 The Personal Dimensions: Friendships, Conflicts, and Contested Loyalties

The intellectual relationships among the three figures were also personal relationships, with all the complexity, warmth, tension, and occasional conflict that personal relationships entail. These personal dimensions cannot be simply separated from the intellectual dimensions, because intellectual disagreements often have personal dimensions and personal conflicts often have intellectual roots.

The bohemian social world of Dhaka's intellectual community in the 1970s and 1980s, in which Sofa and Khan both participated, was a world of extraordinary intensity and intimacy. Intellectual friendships were formed in settings, coffee shops, book stalls, university common rooms, private flats, and late-night conversations, in which personal and intellectual life were not clearly distinguished. Disagreements about ideas were simultaneously disagreements about how to live, what kind of person to be, what kind of intellectual to become. The stakes were therefore always higher than purely academic disagreements, because they touched on matters of personal identity and integrity.

There is some evidence, drawn from accounts by contemporaries and from occasional pointed remarks in the published writings, that relationships within this intellectual triangle were not always smooth. Sofa's account of his relationship with Razzaq in "Joddhopi Amar Guru" includes moments of frustration and even gentle exasperation alongside the profound admiration and affection that dominate the narrative. Khan's early critique of Razzaq, which Sofa found

inadequate, created a moment of tension in the Sofa-Khan relationship that seems to have been resolved through subsequent intellectual development but that left traces in both of their writings.

The question of intellectual ownership, of who gets credit for particular ideas and who has the right to interpret and extend particular intellectual legacies, is a perennial source of conflict in intellectual communities. It has also been a dimension of the ongoing reception of all three figures, with different intellectual factions in Bangladesh claiming particular affinities with one or another of them and sometimes using those claims to legitimate their own positions while delegitimizing those of their opponents.

6.5 The Question of Conspiracy: Real and Alleged

The word "conspiracy" in the context of intellectual history can mean several different things. At one extreme, it refers to deliberate, coordinated plans to suppress or discredit particular thinkers or particular ideas. At the other extreme, it refers to patterns of institutional and social behavior that systematically disadvantage certain kinds of intellectual work without anyone explicitly planning this result.

In the intellectual history of Bangladesh, both senses are relevant. There is strong evidence that all three figures faced deliberate, politically motivated attempts to suppress or discredit their work at various points in their careers. Razzaq was targeted by the Ayub Khan regime's attempt to dismiss him from his university position. Sofa was denied institutional recognition and material support in ways that seem to have been at least partly politically motivated. Khan has faced various forms of institutional friction and organized opposition from forces threatened by his critiques.

But there is also the subtler, structural sense in which the institutional framework of Bangladeshi intellectual life consistently disadvantages the kind of independent, critical, and politically engaged intellectual work that all three figures represent. The concentration of cultural power in institutions like Bangla Academy, which can reward or withhold recognition, the dominance of pro-establishment perspectives in mainstream media, the dependence of university intellectuals on institutional goodwill for their careers, and the broader social pressures that reward conformity and punish independence, all create structural conditions within which genuine intellectual independence is difficult to sustain.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE PHILOSOPHICAL GROUNDWORK

Colonialism, Postcoloniality, and the Architecture of Bangladeshi Thought

7.1 The Colonial Encounter and Its Intellectual Consequences

The encounter between Bengal and British colonialism was not merely an economic and political event. It was also a philosophical event, one that transformed the intellectual life of Bengal in ways that continue to shape intellectual practice in Bangladesh today. The colonial encounter

introduced new epistemologies, new genres of knowledge, new institutional frameworks for the production and certification of knowledge, and new relationships between knowledge and power that displaced, marginalized, and in some cases destroyed earlier intellectual traditions.

The most visible dimension of this transformation was the introduction of Western-style education as the primary pathway to economic and social advancement under colonial conditions. The colonial educational system, designed as Macaulay's famous 1835 Minute on Indian Education explicitly stated, to produce a class of persons Indian in blood and color but English in tastes, opinions, morals, and intellect, did more than simply transmit knowledge. It created a social hierarchy in which proximity to Western knowledge and Western cultural norms was equated with civilization and rationality, while distance from them was equated with backwardness and irrationality.

For Bengali Muslims, this colonial epistemological hierarchy was doubly damaging. Not only did it position the English-educated Bengali Hindu intelligentsia as the natural intellectual leaders of Bengali society, thereby reproducing within Bengali society the subordination that colonialism imposed on India relative to Britain. It also marginalized the Islamic intellectual traditions, the madrasa education, the Arabic and Persian linguistic cultures, and the Sufi philosophical traditions, that had provided the framework for Bengali Muslim intellectual and spiritual life before and during the colonial period.

This double marginalization is the historical background for Sofa's analysis of Bengali Muslim identity and for Khan's analysis of the continuing consequences of colonial epistemology in contemporary Bangladesh. It explains why the question of which language should be the medium of higher education is not merely a practical question about communication efficiency but a deeply political question about whose cultural forms are recognized as having intellectual validity.

7.2 The Question of Modernity and Its Multiple Forms

One of the most important philosophical debates that runs through the intellectual work of all three figures concerns the nature of modernity and its relationship to Western cultural forms. The dominant narrative of modernity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries positioned it as a universal process whose paradigmatic form was the Western European experience of industrialization, secularization, democratization, and rationalization. On this narrative, societies outside Western Europe were understood as more or less advanced in their approach to a modern condition whose essential content was already determined by the Western experience.

This narrative was challenged by a range of thinkers in the second half of the twentieth century, including many of the postcolonial theorists that Salimullah Khan engages with most extensively. The challenge took several forms: the assertion that modernity has been multiple rather than singular, producing different formations in different cultural and historical contexts; the argument that what presented itself as universal modernity was in fact a particular cultural form that served the interests of Western imperial powers; and the claim that genuine modernity in postcolonial societies required creative appropriation and transformation of the global cultural resources of the modern period rather than simple imitation of Western models.

All three figures in this study were engaged, in their different ways, with this set of questions. Razzaq's emphasis on the specific ecological and social structural conditions of Bangladesh as the appropriate starting point for political analysis reflects an implicit pluralism about modernity: his insistence that adequate political theory must be rooted in the specific conditions of the society it analyses presupposes that there is no single universal model of political development that can simply be applied to any society regardless of context.

Sofa's engagement with the question of Bengali Muslim modernity is most explicit in "Bangali Musalmaner Man." His argument that Bengali Muslims need to develop a self-understanding that is genuinely their own, neither a simple adoption of Western secular modernity nor a retreat into Islamic traditionalism, but a creative synthesis rooted in the distinctive cultural resources of Bengali Muslim history, is one of the most thoughtful contributions to the debate about multiple modernities in the South Asian context.

Khan's engagement with the question is most systematic and most theoretically sophisticated. His use of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist political economy to analyze the specific forms of subjectivity produced by colonial modernity in Bangladesh provides a framework for understanding not just the intellectual but also the psychological dimensions of the decolonization project. His argument that genuine decolonization requires transformation at the level of desire and self-understanding, not merely at the level of institutional arrangement, is one of the most important philosophical contributions to the debate about what the postcolonial condition actually requires.

7.3 The Bengali Language as Epistemological Resource

The question of language is, for all three figures, not merely a practical or political question but a philosophical and epistemological one. The argument for Bengali as the medium of higher education is not simply that Bengali is more accessible to a majority of Bangladeshis, though that is true and important. It is also that knowledge produced and transmitted through Bengali is different in character from knowledge produced and transmitted through English, because language is not merely a neutral medium through which pre-formed thoughts are transmitted but is itself a structure of meaning that shapes what can be thought and how it can be understood.

This Humboldtian insight, the insight that different languages embody different ways of engaging with the world and that the diversity of languages represents an irreplaceable diversity of intellectual resources, runs through the language arguments of all three figures. When Khan argues for Bengali-medium education, he is not simply arguing that Bengali students will learn more effectively in their mother tongue, though he believes this. He is arguing that knowledge in Bengali, knowledge that uses Bengali linguistic and cultural resources, knowledge that is embedded in the specific historical and experiential context of Bengali society, is epistemologically richer and more adequate to the task of understanding Bangladeshi reality than knowledge that comes pre-packaged in English and pre-structured by the intellectual concerns of societies very different from Bangladesh.

This argument connects to a broader critique of what might be called epistemological imperialism: the tendency of dominant intellectual traditions to present themselves as universal

while in fact reflecting the specific concerns, assumptions, and cultural frameworks of the societies in which they developed. Salimullah Khan's extensive engagement with the Western critical theoretical tradition is not a contradiction of this critique but a demonstration of its possibility: it is possible to use the resources of Western critical theory critically, extracting what is genuinely useful while resisting the implicit universalism that often accompanies it.

CHAPTER EIGHT: BENGALI MUSLIM IDENTITY

Historical Formation, Philosophical Analysis, and Contemporary Debates

8.1 The Longue Duree of Bengali Muslim Identity Formation

The formation of Bengali Muslim identity as a distinctive social and cultural phenomenon took place over many centuries and through multiple overlapping processes. Understanding these processes is essential for understanding both the historical context of the intellectual tradition we are examining and the substantive content of much of the philosophical analysis that Sofa, Khan, and the tradition of Razzaq have produced.

The conversion of significant portions of the Bengali population to Islam began in the thirteenth century with the arrival of Muslim armies from the northwest and the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate's authority over Bengal. But mass conversion to Islam in Bengal was not primarily a consequence of military conquest. It was rather a complex social process driven by multiple factors: the appeal of Islam's egalitarian theology to communities suffering under the hierarchical constraints of the caste system; the missionary activity of Sufi saints, who often combined Islamic piety with respect for local cultural forms; the economic advantages that attached to membership in the Muslim political community in certain periods; and the gradual cultural osmosis through which Islamic practices and beliefs spread along trade routes and through social networks.

The result was a Bengali Muslim community whose Islam was always culturally particular. It was Bengali Islam, embedded in Bengali language, Bengali aesthetics, Bengali agricultural practices, and Bengali social structures. The tension between this culturally particular Bengali Islam and the more universalistic claims of Islamic theology and jurisprudence has been a persistent feature of Bengali Muslim intellectual life, and it is precisely this tension that Sofa's analysis of Bengali Muslim identity is designed to illuminate.

8.2 The Impact of Colonial Rule on Bengali Muslim Identity

British colonial rule had a profound and contradictory impact on Bengali Muslim identity. On one hand, the colonial system systematically disadvantaged Bengali Muslims relative to Bengali Hindus in the competition for educational advancement and professional employment, because the networks through which colonial opportunities were distributed were initially more accessible to Hindu communities whose interaction with the colonial system had begun earlier.

This disadvantage contributed to the sense of backwardness and marginalization that has been a recurring theme in Bengali Muslim self-analysis.

On the other hand, colonial rule also created the conditions for the development of a distinctive Bengali Muslim political consciousness. The mobilization of Muslim communities around political demands specific to their situation, from the Khilafat Movement of the early 1920s through the Pakistan Movement of the 1940s, produced new forms of collective identity and political solidarity that transcended the local and communal boundaries within which Muslim life had previously been organized.

The pivotal figure in the intellectual articulation of Bengali Muslim identity in the colonial period was Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, who founded the Aligarh Muslim University and developed an argument for the distinct political interests of the Muslim community that ultimately contributed to the logic of Pakistan. But this Aligarh tradition was in significant tension with the more pluralist and syncretic tradition of Bengali Islam, and the tension between these two visions of Muslim identity remains a live issue in Bangladeshi intellectual and political life.

8.3 The 1947 Partition and the Crisis of Bengali Muslim Identity

The Partition of 1947 created an acute crisis of Bengali Muslim identity. The creation of Pakistan required Bengali Muslims to choose between two aspects of their identity that had previously coexisted, if tensely: their Bengali cultural identity and their Muslim political identity. Pakistan's insistence on Urdu as the national language made this choice explicit and unavoidable. The Language Movement of 1952, which asserted the primacy of Bengali as the mother tongue and official language, was in essence a rejection of the Pakistani framework in which Islamic identity was supposed to override linguistic and cultural particularities.

But the resolution of this crisis through the achievement of Bangladeshi independence in 1971 did not simply dissolve the tensions within Bengali Muslim identity. It created new questions: if Bengali Muslims are not simply Muslims who happen to speak Bengali but are Bengali people who happen to be Muslim, what does this mean for the relationship between the national identity of Bangladesh and the religious identity of its Muslim majority? What kind of state should Bangladesh be, and what role should Islam play in its public life?

These questions have been continuously contested in Bangladeshi politics and culture since 1971, and the intellectual work of all three figures we are examining has contributed to that contest. Razzaq's vision of a decentralized, tolerant, empirically grounded political community that draws on the best of both the Bengali and the Islamic intellectual traditions. Sofa's argument for a Bengali Muslim identity that is genuinely self-confident, neither servile toward Western secular modernity nor retreating into Islamic fundamentalism. Khan's insistence that genuine decolonization requires a transformation of the very terms in which identity questions are posed, moving beyond the binary oppositions that colonial thinking imposed on Bengali Muslim consciousness.

CHAPTER NINE: THE JURISPRUDENTIAL DIMENSION

Law, Justice, and the Philosophy of Political Community

9.1 Razzaq and the Foundations of Political Community

Abdur Razzaq's intellectual formation at the London School of Economics under Harold Laski gave him a distinctive perspective on the relationship between law, justice, and political community. Laski's pluralist political theory challenged the traditional legal positivist view of law as simply the command of the sovereign, and argued instead for a view of law as embedded in a complex social context of competing groups, interests, and values that no single sovereign can simply override. This Laskian pluralism translated, in Razzaq's work, into a deep skepticism about constitutional formalism: the idea that political problems can be solved by getting the formal constitutional arrangements right.

Razzaq was keenly aware that constitutions are not self-executing documents. They require social and political conditions of their own existence: a political culture that takes constitutional norms seriously, institutional actors who have incentives to uphold rather than circumvent constitutional provisions, and a civil society capable of holding governmental actors accountable to constitutional standards. The repeated experience of constitutional failure in Bangladesh, from the BAKSAL constitutional transformation of 1975 through the subsequent series of military coups and constitutional suspensions, has confirmed Razzaq's skepticism about the adequacy of purely formal constitutional approaches to the problem of legitimate political authority.

The jurisprudential implication of this analysis is that the question of what law is cannot be answered simply by pointing to the formal legal system. Law in the deeper sense, the set of norms and values that actually govern the distribution of power and the resolution of conflicts in a society, is always rooted in social and cultural conditions that the formal legal system reflects but cannot simply create. A legal system that is out of alignment with the social and cultural conditions of the society it governs will always be fragile, vulnerable to being circumvented or overridden by more powerful social forces.

9.2 Sofa and the Ethics of Truth-Telling

Ahmed Sofa's contribution to jurisprudential philosophy is less formal and more ethical than Razzaq's, but it is no less significant. His central jurisprudential concern is with the conditions of honest speech and truthful representation in public life, a concern that he addresses primarily through the critique of intellectual dishonesty and opportunism.

The legal and quasi-legal implications of Sofa's analysis are worth drawing out. His critique of intellectuals who align their work with the interests of political power at the expense of truth is implicitly a critique of a particular kind of expert testimony: the testimony of the hired advocate who presents whatever case serves his client's interests rather than the testimony of the honest witness who presents what he has seen and understood. In Sofa's view, intellectuals in Bangladesh had systematically chosen the role of hired advocate over the role of honest witness,

and this choice had profoundly corrupted both the quality of public knowledge and the quality of public decision-making.

This critique has direct relevance to questions of legal and political philosophy. A society in which expert knowledge is systematically distorted by the political and economic interests of those who command it cannot make rational decisions about its own governance. Democratic self-government presupposes access to reasonably accurate knowledge about the conditions of the society being governed, and this access in turn presupposes a community of knowers who are willing to report what they have learned regardless of its political implications.

9.3 Khan and the Critique of Colonial Law

Salimullah Khan's jurisprudential contributions are most fully developed in his critique of colonial law and its continuing presence in postcolonial Bangladesh. His legal training at the University of Dhaka gave him a technical familiarity with the structure of the Bangladeshi legal system, and his subsequent theoretical development gave him the analytical tools to understand that system as a historical artifact rather than a natural given.

The Bangladeshi legal system is, in its fundamental structure, a colonial creation. The fundamental laws governing property, contract, and crime were developed in the colonial period to serve colonial purposes: to facilitate the extraction of resources, to maintain order through the threat of coercive sanction, and to create a class of English-speaking legal professionals who would serve as intermediaries between the colonial administration and the colonized population. These colonial purposes have been formally renounced in independent Bangladesh, but the institutional structures through which they were implemented remain largely in place.

Khan's argument is that this structural inheritance is not neutral. A legal system designed to serve colonial purposes, conducted in the colonial language, administered by a legal profession trained in colonial traditions, and embedded in a bureaucratic culture that reproduces colonial hierarchies, cannot simply be repurposed to serve the goals of democratic self-government and social justice without fundamental transformation. The reforms required are not merely technical but cultural and epistemological: they require a transformation of the very concepts through which legal problems are understood and legal solutions are imagined.

CHAPTER TEN: ETHICAL AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY

Justice, Responsibility, and the Claims of Truth in Bangladeshi Intellectual Life

10.1 The Ethics of Intellectual Independence

The most fundamental ethical commitment shared by all three figures is a commitment to intellectual independence: the conviction that the intellectual's first obligation is to think honestly and speak truthfully, regardless of the social, political, or economic pressures that militate against doing so. This commitment is both more difficult and more important in a context like

Bangladesh's, where institutional pressure toward conformity is intense and where the rewards of co-optation and the penalties of independence are both severe.

Razzaq embodied this commitment through his personal practice. His refusal to publish work he did not consider adequate, his maintenance of intellectual independence throughout the pressures of colonial and postcolonial politics, and his cultivation of a personal life structured around the pursuit of knowledge rather than the accumulation of wealth or social status all expressed a coherent ethical vision of what intellectual life should be.

Sofa expressed the same commitment more dramatically and more publicly, through his refusals of awards from institutions he found inadequately independent, his willingness to criticize powerful figures including his own political allies, and the ferocity of his written attacks on intellectual opportunism. The ethical content of Sofa's intellectual practice is inseparable from its intellectual content: the quality of his analysis depends on the fact that he is genuinely trying to tell the truth rather than to produce arguments convenient for any particular political faction.

Khan has articulated the ethics of intellectual independence most systematically, drawing on the philosophical resources of Aristotelian ethics, Kantian moral philosophy, and the contemporary ethical theory of thinkers like Alain Badiou. Beginning Spring 2020, Khan offered a public lecture course open to all on the topic of Ethics from Aristotle to Badiou, which meets alternate Saturdays at ULAB. [University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh](https://www.ulab.edu.bd/) This course represents a systematic engagement with the philosophical foundations of the ethical commitments that have characterized the intellectual tradition he belongs to and extends.

10.2 The Ethics of Critique

A distinctive ethical dimension of all three figures' work is their understanding of critique as a form of care. The critique of intellectuals, political leaders, institutions, and cultural practices that characterizes much of their writing is not motivated by contempt or hostility. It is motivated, at least in its best moments, by a genuine concern for the health of the society being critiqued and a recognition that honest criticism is a form of intellectual and civic service.

This understanding of critique as care is philosophically rich and practically important. It distinguishes between criticism that is designed to delegitimize and destroy its objects, which functions primarily as a form of political attack, and criticism that is designed to identify and analyze real problems with the aim of contributing to their solution. The latter form of criticism requires not only intellectual honesty but also a kind of intellectual generosity: the willingness to take seriously the claims and achievements of what is being criticized even while identifying its limitations and failures.

Sofa's critique of Bangladeshi intellectuals in "Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas" is a complex case in this regard. Its ferocity is undeniable, and it has sometimes been read as simply an attack on the intellectual class as such. But closer reading reveals that it is motivated by a profound concern for what Bangladesh could become if its intellectual class performed its proper function, and by frustration that this potential is being squandered through opportunism and self-interest. The harshness of the critique is proportional to the urgency of the concern that animates it.

10.3 The Question of Moral Consistency

One of the most difficult and important dimensions of any ethical evaluation of a thinker is the question of consistency: whether the ethical principles they articulate in their work are also reflected in the way they conduct their intellectual and personal lives. This is a question on which all three figures have been subject to critical scrutiny, and the results are, as one might expect from complex human beings living in conditions of extraordinary social and political pressure, mixed.

Razzaq's moral consistency is generally regarded as exceptional. His personal simplicity, his intellectual independence, his generosity toward students and interlocutors regardless of their social status, and his refusal to use his intellectual influence for personal material advantage all represent a high degree of ethical integrity. The criticisms that have been made of his intellectual practice, principally his preference for indirectness and his reluctance to take explicit public positions on urgent political questions, are more matters of intellectual style than of ethical failure.

Sofa's moral life is more complex and more contested. His intellectual courage and independence are beyond dispute. But his personal life, his relationships with women, his economic dependence on others, his periodic accommodation of patrons he also criticized, raises questions about the degree to which his articulated ethical ideals were reflected in his personal conduct. Some critics have argued that the gap between Sofa's fierce public critique of opportunism and certain accommodations in his personal life represents a form of inconsistency that damages his philosophical credibility. Others argue that the distinction between intellectual ethics and personal ethics should not be collapsed, and that the quality of a thinker's intellectual contributions should be evaluated independently of the quality of their personal conduct.

Khan's ethical consistency is a live question in the contemporary moment, in which his institutional position, his public media presence, and his receipt of official recognition coexist with his critique of the institutions that provide these things. His defenders argue that this coexistence is not inconsistent, that genuine intellectual engagement with the society you are criticizing requires accepting a certain degree of institutional embeddedness, and that the alternative of pure outsider status would simply reduce the impact of the critique. His critics argue that the acceptance of official recognition from institutions whose integrity he questions compromises his critical independence in ways that are difficult to fully account for.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: HISTORICAL CONTROVERSIES AND THEIR PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Contested Legacies, Disputed Interpretations, and the Politics of Intellectual Memory

11.1 The Controversy Over 1971 and Its Aftermath

The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 is not simply a historical event. It is a live political issue, the subject of intense and often bitter controversy about what happened, what it meant, how it should be commemorated, and what claims it generates in the present. All three figures have been involved in these controversies, and their contributions to the debates illuminate both their philosophical commitments and the political stakes of historical interpretation.

The most significant controversy concerns the number of people who died during the Liberation War. Bangladeshi official accounts have consistently cited a figure of three million victims, which, if accurate, would make the 1971 violence one of the largest mass atrocities of the twentieth century. Pakistani and some international historians have disputed this figure, arguing that the actual number, while certainly large, was significantly smaller. This numerical dispute is not merely a question of historical accuracy, though it is that. It is a deeply political question about the scale and nature of what Pakistani forces did in 1971, and about the moral and legal implications of that violence for questions of accountability and recognition.

Salimullah Khan has intervened in recent debates on the number of martyrs in the Liberation War of Bangladesh. [Wikipedia](#) Khan's interventions in this debate have been characterized by his typical combination of historical rigor and political courage: he has insisted on the importance of getting the numbers right, while also arguing that the political significance of 1971 does not ultimately depend on the precise numerical accounting of its victims.

The controversy over the characterization of the 1971 violence as genocide is related but distinct. The legal category of genocide requires proof of specific intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. Whether the Pakistani army's actions in 1971 meet this threshold is a question that has been argued extensively in both legal and historical forums, with significant implications for questions of international recognition and diplomatic relations.

11.2 The War Crimes Tribunal Controversy

The International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) established by the Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina to try individuals alleged to have collaborated with Pakistani forces during the Liberation War generated one of the most intense controversies in recent Bangladeshi political history. The tribunal tried and convicted a number of senior figures from the Jamaat-e-Islami party, the Islamic political party whose leadership had been associated with anti-independence forces during 1971. Several of the convicted were sentenced to death and executed.

The ICT generated enormous controversy both domestically and internationally. Supporters argued that it was a necessary and long-overdue exercise of accountability for crimes that had gone unpunished for four decades. Critics argued that the tribunal's procedures were inadequate to ensure fair trials, that its verdicts were influenced by political considerations, and that its effect was less to deliver justice than to provide the Awami League government with a politically useful way of delegitimizing its principal opponents.

During the Shahbagh Movement in Dhaka in 2013, which was organized in support of the war crime tribunal and demanded the death penalty for convicted collaborators, Salimullah Khan

came out in strong support of the movement, denounced communal attacks, and criticized Farhad Mazhar's position with regard to the events. [Tritiyomatra](#)

This support for the Shahbagh Movement was consistent with Khan's broader commitment to the principles of the Liberation War and his analysis of how those principles had been betrayed by those who collaborated with Pakistani forces. But it also placed him in a politically complex position, as the Shahbagh Movement was closely associated with the Awami League government and its political project. The subsequent history of that government, which became increasingly authoritarian in the years following 2013, raises retrospective questions about the political alignment that Shahbagh support implied.

11.3 The Controversies Surrounding Intellectualism and Opportunism

Ahmed Sofa's critique of Bangladeshi intellectuals in "Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas" generated controversy from the moment of its publication that has never fully subsided. The controversy has taken different forms at different historical moments, but its fundamental content has remained relatively constant: the dispute between those who find Sofa's critique accurate and valuable, because it names a real problem with sufficient clarity and force to potentially initiate change, and those who find it unfair and counterproductive, because it paints with too broad a brush and provides no constructive alternative.

A particularly sharp controversy concerned specific individuals who felt themselves addressed by Sofa's critique. The intellectual community of Bangladesh is small enough that Sofa's general characterizations were often understood as pointing to specific persons, and the individuals concerned responded with a combination of public denials, private outrage, and in some cases concerted efforts to marginalize Sofa and his work. These efforts were largely unsuccessful in the long run, because Sofa's analytical accuracy became increasingly apparent as subsequent events confirmed his predictions about the trajectory of Bangladeshi intellectual and political life.

The controversy over Sofa's evaluation of specific intellectual figures, including Rabindranath Tagore, has been particularly intense. Sofa's critical analysis of Tagore, the towering figure of Bengali literary culture whose influence on Bengali intellectual life has been immense, positioned him as willing to challenge even the most sacred icons of the Bengali literary tradition. He edited a collection of writings by Ahmed Sofa on Rabindranath Tagore, suggesting the complexity of Sofa's engagement with Tagore. [Alchetron](#)

11.4 Razzaq's Relationship with Multiple Political Regimes

A significant historical controversy concerning Abdur Razzaq concerns his relationships with the multiple political regimes that governed Bangladesh from independence through his death in 1999. As a National Professor appointed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's government, Razzaq received official recognition and institutional status from the regime that he was simultaneously, in his conversations and lectures, analyzing with a critical eye that could not have been entirely comfortable for the political leadership.

His subsequent relationships with the Zia and Ershad governments, which he neither explicitly endorsed nor publicly opposed, raise questions about the relationship between intellectual independence and political accommodation that have no easy answers. Razzaq seems to have maintained a consistent practice of avoiding explicit public political commitments while continuing to influence political thinking through his conversations and through the political actors, across the spectrum, who continued to seek his counsel.

This practice of engaged detachment is philosophically coherent: it is possible to influence political development more effectively through the formation of political thinkers than through explicit political advocacy, and explicit political commitment to any particular regime risks compromising the intellectual independence that is the source of genuine intellectual influence. But it is also potentially compatible with a kind of political opportunism, an acceptance of official status and recognition from regimes of varying political legitimacy, that is in some tension with the ethical rigor that Razzaq's intellectual practice otherwise exemplifies.

CHAPTER TWELVE: CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Razzaq, Sofa, Khan, and Bangladesh in 2025 and 2026

12.1 The 2024 Political Changes and Their Intellectual Implications

The political upheaval of 2024 that brought down the government of Sheikh Hasina Wajed created a moment of genuine political openness in Bangladesh, the first such moment in many years. For intellectuals in the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, this moment was both an opportunity and a challenge: an opportunity to bring the intellectual resources of this tradition to bear on the urgent practical questions of political reconstruction, and a challenge to do so without becoming co-opted by any of the competing political forces vying for control of the new political space.

The questions that the 2024 political changes have placed most urgently on the agenda are precisely the questions that this intellectual tradition has been engaging with for decades. What kind of democratic system is appropriate for Bangladesh, given its specific social and political conditions? How should the relationship between the state and civil society be organized? What role should Islam play in the public life of a predominantly Muslim society? How should Bangladesh manage its relationships with India, China, and the broader international community in ways that genuinely serve Bangladeshi national interests? What would genuine economic justice require in a society marked by profound inequalities?

Razzaq's analysis of the structural conditions that have produced Bangladesh's political pathologies provides a framework for understanding why the 2024 changes, significant as they are, are unlikely by themselves to produce the deep transformation that genuine improvement requires. His insistence that political reform must be rooted in social and cultural transformation, not merely in institutional rearrangement, is as relevant in 2025 as it was in 1981.

Sofa's critique of intellectual opportunism provides a framework for understanding why the intellectual community's response to the 2024 changes is likely to repeat familiar patterns: the rapid reorientation of intellectual allegiances to align with new power configurations, the rapid discovery of virtues in previously vilified positions, and the equally rapid rediscovery of vices in previously celebrated positions. The intellectual courage that Sofa demanded, and that he himself exemplified, is no more common in 2025 than it was in 1972.

Khan's analysis of the colonial dimensions of Bangladeshi political and cultural life provides a framework for understanding why the 2024 changes, however significant, do not by themselves constitute the decolonization that genuine transformation requires. The structural hierarchies that colonial rule established, the language hierarchies, the educational hierarchies, the professional and social hierarchies, remain in place even after political leadership changes, and addressing them requires a sustained and comprehensive program of cultural and institutional transformation that no government can accomplish on its own.

12.2 The Continuing Relevance of Language Politics

The language question that has been central to Khan's intellectual career has become, if anything, more urgent in the context of the 2024 political changes. The movement that brought down the Hasina government was significantly a movement of young people educated in Bangladesh's increasingly stratified educational system, and the question of whether the country's educational and professional institutions should be genuinely accessible to students from Bengali-medium backgrounds is directly connected to the questions of political inclusion and social justice that the movement raised.

At a December 2024 conference on language evolution, Khan reiterated the need to prioritize the mother tongue for inclusive accessibility. On April 12, 2025, he lamented the marginalization of Bengali-medium institutions, noting their relegation to second- or third-tier status amid the rise of English-medium alternatives, and linking this trend to systemic devaluation that hinders equitable access to civil service examinations like the BCS, where Bengali-medium graduates compete at a disadvantage. [Groklopedia](#)

This argument connects the language question directly to the question of democratic legitimacy. A democracy in which access to the institutions that govern society is systematically restricted by the language one has been educated in is not fully democratic. The young people who led the 2024 movement were asserting their right to participate in the governance of their country, but the institutional structures of that country continue to advantage those with English-medium education in ways that undermine the democratic promise of the movement.

12.3 The India Question and Regional Geopolitics

The question of Bangladesh's relationship with India has become one of the most contentious issues in the post-2024 political landscape. Khan's consistent analysis of Indian-Bangladeshi relations as structured by an unequal power relationship that serves Indian interests at the expense of Bangladeshi sovereignty has taken on new relevance in a political environment in

which the Awami League government, which had been closely aligned with India, has been replaced by a more uncertain political configuration.

Khan's accusation that India wants to keep Bangladesh as its colony using the excuse of its helping the country in its war of liberation in 1971 has generated fierce debate. He contended that such narratives perpetuate dependency and undermine Bangladesh's sovereignty. [Grokopedia](#)

The complexity of the Bangladesh-India relationship defies simple characterization. India's assistance in the 1971 Liberation War was decisive and genuine, and Bangladeshi acknowledgment of this is both historically accurate and politically appropriate. But acknowledgment of historical debt does not require permanent political subordination, and the question of whether India's subsequent policies toward Bangladesh have served Bangladesh's genuine interests or have used the language of partnership to maintain conditions of dependency is a legitimate analytical question, not a conspiracy theory.

Khan's analytical framework provides a way of addressing this question that is neither naively hostile to India nor uncritically deferential to it. His insistence on analyzing regional political relationships through the lens of structural power asymmetries rather than through the lens of declared intentions allows for a nuanced assessment that can acknowledge both the genuine elements of cooperation and friendship in the Bangladesh-India relationship and the structural conditions that systematically advantage Indian interests.

12.4 The Intellectual Climate of Bangladesh in 2025

The intellectual climate of Bangladesh in 2025, shaped by decades of the intellectual labor represented by the Razzaq-Sofa-Khan tradition and also by the increasingly rapid circulation of ideas through social media and digital communication platforms, is both more vibrant and more fractured than at any previous point in the country's history.

More vibrant because the ideas that Razzaq pioneered in his oral teaching, that Sofa developed in his prolific writing, and that Khan has systematized in his theoretical work have been absorbed into the mainstream of Bangladeshi intellectual debate in ways that have enriched and expanded that debate. The vocabulary of postcolonial critique, the analysis of intellectual opportunism, the concern for Bengali linguistic and cultural independence, the insistence on equality, human dignity, and social justice as the foundational principles of the Bangladeshi political project, all of these have become part of the shared intellectual resources available to anyone who wants to think seriously about Bangladesh.

More fractured because the social and political conditions of 2025, with their intense polarization, their rapid circulation of misinformation alongside information, their competitive pressures on intellectuals to take sides in political conflicts at the expense of analytical independence, and their new forms of institutional pressure and reward, create new versions of precisely the challenges of intellectual independence that Sofa identified in 1972. The technology has changed but the fundamental challenge has not: how to think and speak honestly in conditions designed to reward conformity and penalize independence.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS

Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Postcolonialism, and the Synthesis of a Bangladeshi Critical Tradition

13.1 The Marxist Dimension

All three figures engage with Marxist thought, though in different ways and to different degrees. Razzaq's engagement with Marxism was partly mediated through Laski's democratic socialist framework, which drew on Marxist political economy while rejecting the vanguard party model and insisting on the primacy of democratic forms. His analysis of political economy in Bengal drew on concepts derived from the Marxist tradition but was never doctrinaire in its application of them.

Sofa's engagement with Marxism was more direct and more complicated. He was briefly associated with the communist movement in his early years, but his relationship with doctrinaire Marxism was always ambivalent. He found in Marxism a powerful analytical framework for understanding the relationship between class, power, and cultural production, but he was critical of the tendency of Bangladeshi Marxists to apply mechanical and Eurocentric versions of Marxist theory to conditions very different from those in which the theory was developed.

Khan's engagement with Marxism is the most systematically developed of the three. His PhD from the New School, with its emphasis on political economy and the history of economic thought, gave him a deep familiarity with both the classical Marxist tradition and its twentieth-century developments. His subsequent integration of Marxist political economy with Lacanian psychoanalysis represents one of the most theoretically ambitious intellectual projects in the history of Bangladeshi scholarship.

The Lacanian-Marxist synthesis that Khan has developed allows him to analyze Bangladeshi social and political life at multiple levels simultaneously: the level of political economy, examining how material conditions shape and constrain political possibilities; the level of political ideology, examining how ruling class interests are represented and naturalized in public discourse; and the level of political psychology, examining how the structural conditions of colonial and postcolonial society shape the desires, fantasies, and self-understandings of social subjects. This multilevel analysis provides a far richer account of Bangladeshi social dynamics than any single theoretical framework could produce independently.

13.2 The Psychoanalytic Dimension

The application of psychoanalytic theory to social and political analysis has a long and distinguished history in Western critical thought, from Wilhelm Reich's work on the mass psychology of fascism through the Frankfurt School's analysis of the authoritarian personality to Lacanian approaches to ideology and political subjectivity. Khan's deployment of this tradition in

the analysis of Bangladeshi society is both intellectually courageous, because psychoanalytic social theory is not widely accepted in South Asian academic contexts, and analytically productive.

The Lacanian framework is particularly useful for understanding what Khan identifies as the perverse structure of Bangladeshi ruling class political behavior: the simultaneous official endorsement and practical violation of democratic and cultural norms. In Lacanian terms, this perversity is not simply hypocrisy in the colloquial sense. It is a structured relationship between knowledge and enjoyment in which the subject maintains a split between what it officially knows and what it actually does, deriving a particular form of satisfaction from the violation of the norms it publicly endorses.

This analysis has implications for understanding why straightforward rational arguments for democratic reform and cultural decolonization often fail to produce the behavioral changes they are designed to promote. If the problem is not simply one of ignorance or error but of a structured psychological formation in which norm violation is itself pleasurable, then the solution cannot be simply the provision of better arguments or better information. It requires a transformation at the level of desire and subjective formation that is far more difficult and far more deeply rooted than rational persuasion can accomplish.

13.3 The Postcolonial Theoretical Dimension

The postcolonial theory tradition, associated with figures like Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and their many successors, has been an important resource for Salimullah Khan's intellectual work and provides a theoretical context within which the contributions of all three figures can be located.

Said's concept of Orientalism, the analysis of how Western knowledge about the East functions as a form of power by creating stereotyped images of Oriental societies as static, irrational, and in need of Western governance, resonates with Khan's analysis of how Western-derived intellectual frameworks function in Bangladesh to position Western social scientific knowledge as universal while marginalizing indigenous intellectual traditions.

Fanon's analysis of the psychological dimensions of colonial oppression, the way in which colonial domination creates conditions of self-alienation and internalized inferiority in the colonized, provides a framework for understanding the "inferiority complex" that Sofa identified at the center of Bengali Muslim consciousness in "Bangali Musalmaner Man." Where Sofa diagnosed the problem primarily from a cultural and historical perspective, Fanon's psychological framework provides additional analytical depth.

Spivak's question of whether the subaltern can speak, and her analysis of the conditions under which the voices of those who are most marginalized in postcolonial societies can be heard, connects directly to Khan's concern with the Bengali-medium majority of Bangladeshi society, those who conduct their intellectual and professional lives in Bengali rather than English and who are systematically disadvantaged by the linguistic hierarchies of the postcolonial state.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

The Tradition in Global Context

14.1 Comparisons with Other Postcolonial Intellectual Traditions

The intellectual tradition represented by Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan does not exist in isolation. It has parallels and connections with similar traditions in other postcolonial societies that are illuminating for understanding both its distinctive features and its place in the broader global history of postcolonial thought.

The most obvious comparisons are within South Asia. The tradition of critical public intellectualism in India, represented by figures like B.R. Ambedkar, M.N. Roy, Amartya Sen, and many others, shares with the Bangladeshi tradition a concern with the legacies of colonialism, the challenges of democratic institution-building in conditions of deep social inequality, and the relationship between cultural traditions and political possibilities. But the Bangladeshi tradition has its own distinctive emphases, shaped by the specific conditions of Bengali Muslim society and by the particular political history of Bangladesh.

Comparisons with African intellectual traditions are also instructive. The work of Frantz Fanon, which is a significant influence on Khan, developed in the context of the Algerian independence movement and represents an attempt to understand the psychological dimensions of colonial oppression from the perspective of the colonized. Fanon's insistence that decolonization is not merely a political and economic project but a profound transformation of consciousness and subjectivity resonates strongly with Khan's analysis of what genuine decolonization would require in Bangladesh.

The tradition of Latin American critical thought, particularly the liberation theology tradition associated with Gustavo Gutierrez and others, and the dependency theory tradition associated with thinkers like Andre Gunder Frank, also provides useful comparative perspectives. Both traditions share with the Bangladeshi intellectual tradition a concern with the structural conditions that maintain postcolonial dependency, and both advocate for forms of intellectual engagement that are rooted in the experience of the poor and the marginalized rather than in the perspectives of elites.

14.2 The Tradition and Western Critical Theory

The relationship between the intellectual tradition examined in this textbook and the major traditions of Western critical theory is complex and merits careful analysis. This is a relationship of genuine intellectual engagement, not of simple influence and reception.

The major traditions of Western critical theory that are most relevant to the Bangladeshi intellectual tradition we are examining include the Frankfurt School's critical theory, associated

with Adorno, Horkheimer, Habermas, and their successors; the Marxist political theory tradition, in its multiple forms; and the poststructuralist and postmodern traditions associated with Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and their successors.

Khan's engagement with these traditions is the most direct and most systematically developed of the three figures. But his engagement is critical rather than simply receptive. He draws on Western critical theory not to apply it mechanically to Bangladeshi conditions but to extract analytical tools that he then uses selectively and critically in the analysis of specific Bangladeshi problems. The test of a theoretical tool, for Khan, is always whether it helps to illuminate the specific realities of Bangladeshi social and political life, not whether it is in conformity with the authoritative interpretations of the theoretical tradition from which it is drawn.

14.3 The Tradition and Islamic Philosophy

The relationship between the intellectual tradition we are examining and the broader tradition of Islamic philosophy is a complex and often underappreciated dimension of its significance. All three figures operated in a society in which Islam is the religion of the great majority of the population, and in which Islamic intellectual and ethical frameworks have been an important part of the cultural landscape. Their engagements with Islamic thought, both explicit and implicit, are therefore a significant dimension of their intellectual work.

Razzaq's engagement with Islamic thought was subtle and largely implicit. His concern for the specific cultural and historical formation of Bengali Muslim society reflected an awareness of the Islamic dimension of that formation, even when he was not explicitly addressing it. His tolerant, pluralist, empiricist intellectual orientation is itself consistent with certain strands of Islamic intellectual tradition, particularly the tradition of rational theology and jurisprudence that emphasized the importance of reasoned inquiry rather than blind acceptance of authority.

Sofa's engagement with Islam was more explicit and more controversial. His critique of religious orthodoxy and fundamentalism, his analysis of how Islamic religious institutions had sometimes functioned to maintain rather than challenge social hierarchies, and his insistence on the importance of rational inquiry and independent thought in a society dominated by religious authority, put him in tension with more conservative Islamic perspectives. But his work also drew on and celebrated certain dimensions of Bengali Islamic culture, particularly the syncretic Sufi tradition that had been a powerful force for both spiritual and social transformation in the history of Bengal.

Khan's engagement with Islam is the most theoretically developed of the three. His analysis of how Islamic jurisprudence and theology have developed in the context of specific historical and social conditions, and his critique of both Islamic fundamentalism and secular dismissal of the Islamic tradition as simply backward and irrational, reflects a sophisticated engagement with the ongoing debates about Islam's relationship to modernity and democratic governance.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE LEGACY AND THE UNFINISHED PROJECT

What Remains to Be Done

15.1 The Unresolved Questions

The intellectual tradition represented by Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan has made extraordinary contributions to the understanding of Bangladesh: its history, its political economy, its cultural formation, its intellectual life, and its possible futures. But it has also left certain questions unresolved, or only partially resolved, that remain urgent for the intellectual work that must continue after them.

The first unresolved question concerns the relationship between cultural decolonization and social transformation. Khan's insistence on the importance of language, cultural identity, and epistemic independence as dimensions of genuine decolonization is analytically compelling. But the relationship between these cultural transformations and the more immediately pressing questions of economic justice, physical security, and democratic accountability is not always clear. A Bangladesh that conducts its higher education in Bengali but continues to be governed by a class structure that excludes the poor from meaningful participation in political and economic life would represent, at best, a partial and incomplete liberation.

The second unresolved question concerns the relationship between Islamic identity and democratic governance. All three figures have offered important insights on this question, but none has provided a fully satisfying answer. How can a predominantly Muslim society develop democratic institutions that are genuinely representative of its Muslim majority's values and concerns while also protecting the rights of non-Muslim minorities and maintaining the kind of rational, pluralist public discourse that genuine democratic deliberation requires? This question remains one of the most challenging and important in the intellectual life of Bangladesh.

The third unresolved question concerns the mechanisms of cultural and intellectual transformation. The critical analysis that all three figures have offered of Bangladeshi intellectual and cultural life is analytically powerful, but it is less clear about the practical mechanisms through which the transformation it calls for can be achieved. What kinds of educational institutions, what forms of intellectual organization, what modes of cultural production and circulation are most likely to nurture the kind of genuinely independent, self-confident, and socially responsible intellectual life that the tradition demands?

15.2 The Living Legacy: Institutions, Students, and Continuing Debates

The intellectual legacy of the three figures examined in this textbook is not simply a historical artifact. It is a living tradition that continues to develop through the work of students, interpreters, critics, and successors.

Salimullah Khan, as Director of the Center for Advanced Theory at University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh, continues to teach, write, and engage publicly with the intellectual and political questions that have defined his career. He teaches courses on Freudian Psychoanalysis, Modern History of South Asia, and Ethics from Aristotle to Badiou, and edits scholarly series that

provide forums for the continuing development of the theoretical tradition he represents. [University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh](#)

The Ahmed Sofa Rastroshobha along with the Centre for Asian Art and Culture organizes the Ahmed Sofa Memorial Lecture at the University of Dhaka every year, ensuring that Sofa's ideas remain in active circulation and that his intellectual legacy continues to be developed and contested by new generations of thinkers. [Wikipedia](#)

The Abdur Razzaq Foundation, established after Razzaq's death in 1999, has worked to preserve and promote his intellectual legacy, including through the publication in 2022 of his long-unpublished thesis on Political Parties in India, which has provided new textual resources for understanding his intellectual contributions.

These institutional expressions of the tradition's continuing vitality are important, but they are not sufficient. The most important expression of the tradition's living legacy is the ongoing intellectual work of the students, writers, thinkers, and cultural workers who have been inspired and shaped by these three figures and who are developing their own contributions to the unfinished intellectual project of understanding and transforming Bangladesh.

15.3 Toward a Synthesis: What the Tradition as a Whole Offers

Looking at the intellectual tradition represented by Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan as a whole, it is possible to identify certain recurring themes and commitments that constitute its distinctive philosophical contribution.

The first is the insistence on the importance of genuine intellectual independence, understood not merely as individual autonomy but as a social and political value whose cultivation is essential to the health of democratic life. A society in which intellectuals cannot speak truth without suffering serious personal and professional consequences is a society in which the knowledge necessary for rational democratic governance cannot be produced or circulated. The cultivation of the conditions for genuine intellectual independence is therefore not merely a matter of professional ethics but a political imperative.

The second is the emphasis on the specific historical, cultural, and ecological conditions of Bangladeshi society as the necessary starting point for any adequate political or philosophical analysis. The importation of theoretical frameworks developed in very different contexts, without the critical appropriation and adaptation that makes them genuinely useful for understanding specific conditions, is a form of intellectual colonialism that perpetuates the very dependencies it claims to overcome.

The third is the commitment to the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice as the foundational norms of Bangladeshi political life, derived from but not limited to the historical founding moment of 1971. These principles provide the standard against which the actual development of Bangladesh can always be measured, and they are robust enough to generate critical analysis of political developments across the full spectrum of Bangladeshi political debate.

The fourth is the understanding of intellectual work as a form of political practice. The separation between pure scholarship and political engagement, which is institutionalized in certain academic traditions, is rejected by all three figures. They understand thinking and writing as forms of action with real consequences for the world they describe and analyze, and they accept the political responsibilities that this understanding implies.

These four themes, taken together, constitute a distinctive and valuable philosophical orientation that has the potential to contribute significantly to the intellectual work that Bangladesh's continuing development requires.

SUMMARY OF PART ONE

Part One of this textbook has established the biographical, historical, philosophical, and contextual foundations necessary for the detailed analysis that will follow in subsequent parts. We have traced the lives of all three figures from their geographical origins through their intellectual formations to their mature contributions and their continuing relevance. We have analyzed the historical context, from the longue duree of Bengali Muslim identity formation through the colonial period, the partition of 1947, and the Liberation War of 1971, to the contemporary political landscape of Bangladesh in 2025 and 2026. We have examined the intellectual relationships among the three figures, including both their affinities and their tensions, and we have begun to analyze the philosophical content of their contributions in the areas of political philosophy, jurisprudence, ethics, cultural analysis, and the theory of postcolonial modernity.

The analysis has revealed a tradition of extraordinary richness and continuing relevance, a tradition whose engagement with the deepest questions of Bangladeshi political, cultural, and intellectual life has produced insights that are as urgently necessary in the present as they were in the past. The subsequent parts of this textbook will develop these themes in greater depth, examining specific aspects of each figure's work, tracing the controversies and debates that their contributions have generated, and exploring the implications of their intellectual legacy for the most pressing questions that Bangladesh faces today.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTES FOR PART ONE

The following notes provide guidance for further reading on the subjects covered in Part One. Full bibliographic details will be provided in the comprehensive bibliography at the end of the ten-part textbook.

On Abdur Razzaq, the essential primary sources include his lecture "Bangladesh: State of the Nation" (1981), his thesis "Political Parties in India" (published posthumously 2022), and the various essays and interviews collected in posthumous editions. The essential secondary sources include Ahmed Sofa's "Joddhopi Amar Guru," Sardar Fazlul Karim's "Dhaka Bisshobiddalay O
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Purbabangya Samaj," and Salimullah Khan's extended engagement with Razzaq's work in "Bangladesh: Jatiyo Obosthar Chalchitro" (1983).

On Ahmed Sofa, the essential primary sources include "Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas" (1972), "Bangali Musalmaner Man" (1981), "Gabhi Bittanta" (1995), "Joddhopi Amar Guru" (the memoir of Razzaq), and the extensive collections of his essays, poems, and novels. The essential secondary sources include Salimullah Khan's comprehensive assessment "Ahmed Sofa Shanjibani" and the annual Ahmed Sofa Memorial Lectures published by the Ahmed Sofa Rastroshobha.

On Salimullah Khan, the essential primary sources include "Bangladesh: Jatiyo Obosthar Chalchitro" (1983), "Freud Porar Bhumika" (2005), "Behat Biplab 1971" (2007), "Ahmed Sofar Swadesh" (2015), "Adamboma," and the extensive collection of his essays on history, philosophy, politics, and literature. His lectures at the Center for Advanced Theory at ULAB, several of which are available in published form, are also essential.

On the historical context, the essential works include Badruddin Umar's multi-volume history of the Language Movement, Talukder Maniruzzaman's work on Bangladeshi politics, Rehman Sobhan's analysis of the political economy of Bangladesh, and the growing body of scholarship on the 1971 Liberation War and its aftermath.

End of Part One

Part Two will examine in depth the philosophical systems of each figure, analyzing their theoretical commitments, their methodological approaches, and the specific intellectual problems they engaged with most intensively. Part Three will focus on the political theories and their applications to specific problems of Bangladeshi governance and political development. Part Four will examine the jurisprudential dimensions of the tradition in detail. Parts Five through Ten will address, respectively, cultural analysis and literary criticism, the question of Islamic thought and modernity, comparative and global dimensions, ethical philosophy, controversies and their significance, and the prospects for the intellectual tradition in the twenty-first century.

PART TWO

PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS, POLITICAL THEORIES, AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF DISSENT

The Deep Structure of Three Intellectual Universes and Their Collision with Bangladeshi Reality

Preface to Part Two

Part One established the biographical, historical, and contextual scaffolding without which the intellectual content of this tradition cannot be adequately understood. Part Two descends into the engine room. It examines, with sustained analytical rigor, the actual philosophical systems that each figure developed: their epistemologies, their political philosophies, their ethical frameworks, their theories of culture and language, and their understanding of what genuine intellectual work requires. It also examines the intense and unresolved controversies that these systems have generated, both among themselves and in the wider Bangladeshi intellectual and political world. And it brings the analysis into the most immediate present, reading the philosophical resources of this tradition against the extraordinary political events of 2024 and their still-unfolding aftermath, which have reshaped the conditions within which intellectual work in Bangladesh is conducted.

The ambition of this part is to show that the philosophical work of these three figures is not merely academically interesting but practically urgent. Bangladesh in 2025 and 2026 faces a set of questions, about democratic reconstruction, about the relationship between national identity and religious identity, about the structural causes of political failure, about what genuine decolonization requires, and about how a small and economically vulnerable nation can maintain genuine sovereignty in a world dominated by powerful states and global capital, that cannot be adequately addressed without the intellectual resources that this tradition provides. To understand Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan deeply is not an exercise in intellectual antiquarianism. It is preparation for the most consequential debates of the present and the foreseeable future.

CHAPTER ONE: THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF ABDUR RAZZAQ

Knowledge, Power, and the Refusal of Systematic Thought

1.1 What Kind of Thinker Was Razzaq?

To understand Abdur Razzaq's philosophy, one must first resist the temptation to approach it as one would approach the philosophy of a conventional academic whose work is expressed in published texts amenable to systematic analysis. Razzaq was not that kind of thinker. He was, as the comparison with Socrates repeatedly invites us to recognize, a philosopher of conversation and encounter, a man whose intellectual method was inseparable from his social practice, and whose philosophy cannot be fully reconstructed from any written record, however extensive.

This does not mean that his philosophy was incoherent or unsystematic. It means that its systematicity was of a different kind from that of written academic philosophy. The coherence of Razzaq's thought was the coherence of a consistently applied set of intellectual values and analytical orientations: a commitment to empirical inquiry over theoretical dogmatism, a preference for complexity over simplicity, a suspicion of premature closure, and a deep respect for the particularity of historical experience as against the universalizing tendencies of ideological frameworks. These values and orientations manifested consistently across his oral

conversations, his few written texts, and the intellectual dispositions that his students absorbed and then expressed in their own very different published works.

The epistemological foundation of Razzaq's thought, what he believed about the nature of knowledge and how it is acquired, can be reconstructed from several sources: Ahmed Sofa's account in "Joddhopi Amar Guru," Sardar Fazlul Karim's recorded conversations, the late-published thesis on Political Parties in India, and the testimonies of the many students and interlocutors who have written about their experiences with him.

1.2 Empiricism, Skepticism, and the Cultivation of Doubt

The most fundamental epistemological commitment that characterizes Razzaq's approach is a thoroughgoing empiricism: the conviction that genuine knowledge must be grounded in evidence, in historical fact, in the actual dynamics of social and political life, rather than in the abstract deductions of theoretical systems. This empiricism is not the naive empiricism of someone who believes that facts simply speak for themselves without theoretical mediation. Razzaq was deeply learned in political theory and social science, and he understood that all observation is theory-laden, that what one notices as significant is always shaped by the theoretical frameworks one brings to the evidence. But he was deeply suspicious of theoretical systems that had become so elaborate and self-referential that they could no longer be genuinely tested against the evidence, systems in which inconvenient facts were always explained away rather than acknowledged as challenges to the theory's adequacy.

This epistemological suspicion extended to all of the major theoretical frameworks that competed for intellectual dominance in the political life of South Asia during his active years: Marxism, liberal constitutionalism, Islamic political theory, and Bengali nationalism. Each of these frameworks, in his analysis, contained genuine insights but also characteristic blind spots, tendencies to project ideological commitments onto the social world rather than genuinely attending to what the social world was actually doing. The sophisticated political analyst, in his view, needed to be able to use all of these frameworks as analytical tools while remaining genuinely critical of each of them: extracting what was illuminating while resisting the totalizing claims that each framework made for itself.

The cultivation of doubt as an intellectual virtue is closely related to this empiricism. Razzaq seems to have believed, in the Socratic tradition, that the recognition of one's own ignorance is the necessary starting point of genuine inquiry, and that premature certainty, the closure of inquiry before it has fully done its work, is one of the most dangerous intellectual vices. His pedagogical method of responding to questions with further questions, of refusing to provide simple answers to complex questions, was not merely a rhetorical technique. It was an expression of a genuine epistemological conviction that most important questions about political and social life are more complex than any simple answer can capture, and that the honest intellectual response to complexity is to explore it rather than to resolve it artificially.

1.3 The Harold Laski Connection: Political Pluralism and Its South Asian Applications

The most important single intellectual influence on Razzaq's political philosophy was Harold Laski, under whom he studied at the London School of Economics in the late 1940s. Understanding Laski's political philosophy is therefore essential for understanding what Razzaq took from him, what he modified in light of South Asian conditions, and what he ultimately rejected or went beyond.

Harold Laski's political theory was a distinctive form of democratic pluralism that developed through three somewhat distinct phases. In his earlier work, represented by books like "Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty" (1917) and "Authority in the Modern State" (1919), Laski was primarily a pluralist: he argued against the doctrine of state sovereignty and in favor of a view of the state as one association among many, with no automatic claim to supreme authority over all aspects of social life. The state's authority was legitimate only insofar as it served genuine social needs and respected the claims of other associations: churches, trade unions, professional organizations, and other voluntary groups that organized human social life.

In his middle period, associated with works like "A Grammar of Politics" (1925) and "Democracy in Crisis" (1933), Laski moved toward a more explicitly socialist position, arguing that genuine democracy required not merely formal political rights but also substantial economic equality, and that capitalism as a system was fundamentally incompatible with democratic governance because the economic power of the capitalist class inevitably corrupted political processes. His later work, including "The American Democracy" (1948), returned to a more classical liberal framework under the influence of the New Deal experience.

Abdur Razzaq went to the UK to study under Laski at the London School of Economics and chose to return home without obtaining any formal degree after Laski died in 1950. [Banglapedia](#) This timeline means that Razzaq studied with Laski during the period of his most explicitly socialist writing, when Laski was arguing most forcefully that formal political democracy without economic democracy was an inadequate and unstable form of governance. This dimension of Laski's thought left a clear mark on Razzaq's political analysis, which consistently attended to the economic dimensions of political dynamics and was deeply skeptical of purely formal constitutional approaches to the problem of democratic governance.

But Razzaq was not a simple Laskian. The conditions of South Asia were radically different from those of British politics, and the intellectual frameworks developed to analyze British political life required substantial modification to be applicable to the very different social, cultural, economic, and historical conditions of Bengal. The most important modifications that Razzaq made to the Laskian inheritance involved attention to communal and religious identities as politically constitutive forces, attention to the ecological and geographic dimensions of political possibility, and a much sharper awareness of the colonial and postcolonial dimensions of political development than Laski's predominantly Western framework provided.

1.4 The Ecological Theory of Politics

One of Razzaq's most original and least-studied contributions to political analysis is what might be called his ecological theory of politics: his insistence that the physical environment, the

geography, ecology, and natural resource base of a society, shapes political possibilities in ways that purely ideological or institutional analysis tends to miss.

This ecological sensitivity was evident in his analysis of Bangladesh. The Bengal delta's unique hydrology, with its annual floods that simultaneously threaten and fertilize agricultural land, its dependence on the monsoon cycle, its vulnerability to cyclones and storm surges from the Bay of Bengal, and its extraordinary biological diversity in the Sundarbans mangrove forest and other natural ecosystems, creates conditions that have shaped human social organization in Bengal for millennia. The patterns of cooperative labor that flood management requires, the seasonal rhythms of agricultural production, the intimate dependence of village communities on specific water sources and drainage patterns, and the constant need for collective responses to natural disasters, all contribute to a specific social structure and political culture that is not adequately captured by analytical frameworks derived from European or North American experience.

Razzaq argued that the prosperity of Bengal was never dependent on its agriculture but on its trade and commerce, and the products of handicrafts and small-sized enterprises, and asked why traders from the Middle East came to Bangladesh, answering that it was because of its trade and the economic benefits it offered to them. [The Daily Star](#)

This historical-economic analysis has important political implications. It suggests that Bangladesh's natural economic orientation is toward trade, exchange, and the production of specialized goods rather than toward the subsistence agriculture that colonialism imposed and that postcolonial development policies have sometimes reinforced. It suggests that the natural social basis for Bangladeshi political life is not the isolated village community but the river-connected network of market towns and trading relationships that historically organized the delta's economic life. And it suggests that political institutions adequate to Bangladesh's conditions need to be designed with this natural social structure in mind, rather than simply importing institutional forms developed for very different geographical and economic conditions.

1.5 Razzaq on Dynastic Politics and the Decay of Institutions

Razzaq's analysis of dynastic politics as a structural pathology of South Asian democracy is one of his most prescient and enduring analytical contributions. He identified dynastic politics as a persistent South Asian pathology that concentrated power within families, obstructing Westminster-style liberal democracy. [Grokopedia](#) The subsequent history of Bangladesh has been an extended empirical demonstration of the accuracy of this diagnosis.

The mechanisms through which dynastic politics operates in Bangladesh are multiple and mutually reinforcing. Family networks provide the most reliable forms of trust and loyalty in conditions where formal institutions are weak and easily corrupted, creating rational incentives for political organizations to organize themselves around family connections rather than programmatic commitments. The concentration of symbolic capital, name recognition, historical association, and emotional loyalty, in political families makes it extremely difficult for outsiders without family connections to the founding moments of political history to compete effectively for political leadership positions. And the concentration of economic resources in politically connected families, who use political access to accumulate wealth and use wealth to maintain

political access, creates a self-reinforcing cycle of family-based power that is extremely difficult to break through purely formal institutional mechanisms.

The consequences of this dynastic political structure are, in Razzaq's analysis, catastrophic for genuine democratic governance. When political parties are organized around the personal authority of family leaders rather than around programmatic commitments, there is no mechanism for holding those leaders accountable to anything beyond their own judgment. Party members who disagree with a family leader's decisions have no legitimate channel for expressing that disagreement that does not risk their political careers. The result is a systematic suppression of internal dissent that produces political organizations incapable of the genuine deliberation that democracy requires.

The application of this analysis to the specific history of Bangladesh after 1975, with the Awami League organized around the Sheikh family and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party organized around the Zia family, is obvious and has been extensively made by commentators in the Razzaq-Sofa-Khan tradition. But what is less commonly noted is the way in which the July 2024 student uprising can be read as a rejection, at least in its originating impulse, of exactly this dynastic political structure. The student movement that led to the ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2024 had its roots in deep structural issues within Bangladesh's political and economic systems, including the quota system that functioned as a form of political patronage to consolidate the power of Sheikh Hasina's regime. [LPE Project](#) The quota for descendants of Liberation War fighters, which concentrated civil service access in families associated with the Awami League's historical identity, was precisely the kind of mechanism through which dynastic political networks reproduce themselves institutionally, and the students' rejection of it was a rejection of dynastic politics in its most concrete institutional form.

1.6 Razzaq and the Military Question

One of the most politically significant dimensions of Razzaq's analysis was his early and consistent opposition to the incorporation of the military as a central actor in the new Bangladeshi state. During 1969 discussions on Bangladesh's independence, Razzaq opposed incorporating an active military role in the new state, viewing it as a pathway to authoritarian consolidation akin to Pakistan's failures. [Grokopedia](#)

This position requires careful interpretation. Razzaq was not a pacifist, and he did not oppose the existence of a military in an independent Bangladesh. His concern was specifically with the military's relationship to political power: the danger that a military organization with institutional interests of its own would become a player in civilian political competition, would be recruited by civilian political factions as a resource in political struggles, and would eventually develop the capacity and inclination to seize political power directly.

The history of Bangladesh between 1975 and 1990 vindicated this concern with painful clarity. The cycle of military coups and counter-coups that followed the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, culminating in the long military-backed political arrangement under General Ershad, demonstrated that the military's entry into politics, once initiated, is extremely difficult to reverse and generates its own logic of political instability, as different military factions

compete for dominance and as civilian politicians are forced to seek military backing in order to compete against rivals who have already obtained it.

The intellectual legacy of Razzaq's analysis on the military question is relevant to contemporary Bangladesh in multiple ways. The army's role in the transition following the July 2024 uprising, including its relationship to the interim government, its attitude toward the competing political forces seeking to fill the vacuum left by the Awami League's collapse, and its long-term institutional interests in the shape of any new political settlement, are questions that Razzaq's framework illuminates even if it cannot resolve them. The structural pressures that he identified as pushing toward military political involvement have not been eliminated by the events of 2024, and the new political settlement in Bangladesh will need to address these pressures directly if it is to avoid repeating the cycles of the past.

CHAPTER TWO: AHMED SOFA'S PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM

The Philosophy of Prophetic Critique, Intellectual Courage, and the Aesthetics of Truth

2.1 The Structure of Sofa's Intellectual Project

Ahmed Sofa's intellectual project is harder to systematize than Razzaq's, not because it is less coherent but because its coherence is of a different and more generative kind. Where Razzaq's coherence is the coherence of consistently applied analytical values, Sofa's coherence is the coherence of a unified moral vision that expresses itself across an extraordinary range of intellectual and creative genres: essay, novel, poem, polemic, biography, cultural criticism, political analysis, and literary history.

The unifying moral vision at the center of Sofa's work can be stated, at its most fundamental level, in terms of a single commitment: the commitment to truth-telling as the highest intellectual and moral obligation, combined with a passionate concern for the welfare of ordinary Bengali Muslims and a fierce condemnation of the elites, political, intellectual, and religious, who have consistently failed them. This combination of truth-telling commitment and democratic solidarity gives Sofa's work its distinctive moral energy, its sense of urgency that communicates itself even in translation and even to readers who have not lived through the specific circumstances that generated it.

2.2 Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas: A Close Reading

A close and systematic reading of "Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas" (1972) reveals a philosophical argument of considerable sophistication beneath its deliberately polemical surface. The argument has several interlocking components that together constitute a theory of intellectual responsibility in postcolonial conditions.

The first component is a diagnosis of what has gone wrong. Sofa accused Bangladeshi intellectuals of exhibiting servility, cowardice, and opportunism by aligning their writings with

the interests of political and corporate powers, thereby compromising intellectual integrity for personal gain. He contended that this behavior not only impeded the nation's path to genuine independence but also ensured no radical societal restructuring, as intellectuals functioned more as beggars of ideas lacking originality rather than true thinkers challenging the status quo. [Grokopedia](#)

The second component is a structural explanation: why has this pattern of intellectual opportunism developed? Sofa's explanation is not primarily moral: he does not simply argue that Bangladeshi intellectuals are bad people with bad characters. He argues that the structural conditions of intellectual life in Bangladesh, the dependence of intellectuals on state patronage, the absence of institutional frameworks that would protect intellectual independence, the cultural prestige attached to proximity to power, and the economic precarity that makes the prospect of patronage irresistible to those without independent means, create systematic incentives toward opportunism that even people of relatively good character find difficult to resist.

This structural explanation is philosophically significant because it shifts the analysis from the level of individual moral failure to the level of systemic dysfunction. The problem is not that Bangladeshi intellectuals are uniquely corrupt or cowardly: it is that the institutions and incentive structures of Bangladeshi intellectual life systematically reward conformity and punish independence. The solution, therefore, cannot be simply a moral appeal for more courage: it requires structural transformation of the conditions under which intellectual work is conducted.

The third component is a prescription: what should intellectuals do? Sofa's prescription is deceptively simple in its formulation and extremely demanding in its practice: tell the truth. Say what you actually think, regardless of its political implications and regardless of the personal consequences. Refuse the accommodations that institutional life offers in exchange for the suppression of honest judgment. Accept the marginalization, poverty, and social hostility that such refusal will bring.

This prescription is demanding because it requires not merely the occasional act of courageous speech but the construction of an entire mode of intellectual life organized around the principle of unconditional truth-telling. It requires not merely that the intellectual say true things but that the entire organization of the intellectual's professional and personal life be oriented toward the conditions that make unconditional truth-telling possible: financial independence from political patronage, social independence from the networks of obligation that create pressure toward conformity, and psychological independence from the desire for recognition and approval that makes criticism of the powerful personally costly.

2.3 The Theory of Intellectual Responsibility

Sofa's theory of intellectual responsibility, while rooted in a particular historical and cultural context, has philosophical dimensions that transcend that context and connect to broader traditions of thinking about the intellectual's social role.

The most obvious connection is to the tradition of the engaged intellectual associated with Jean-Paul Sartre in France and with analogous figures in other national contexts. Sartre's argument,

developed in "Plaidoyer pour les Intellectuels" (1972), is that the intellectual's specific expertise gives rise to a specific political responsibility: because the intellectual's social function is the production and validation of knowledge, and because knowledge is always politically consequential, the intellectual cannot claim political neutrality without thereby taking a political position in favor of the status quo. Genuine intellectual integrity, for Sartre, requires active political engagement on behalf of those whose interests are systematically misrepresented or suppressed by dominant ideologies.

Sofa's position is both similar to and different from Sartre's. Like Sartre, he insists that the intellectual cannot escape political responsibility. Unlike Sartre, he is deeply suspicious of the intellectual who defines their political engagement as alignment with any particular political force, including leftist or progressive political forces. The Bangladeshi intellectuals whom Sofa most harshly criticizes are precisely those who have aligned themselves with nominally progressive political projects in ways that ultimately serve the political project's power interests rather than the genuine welfare of the people in whose name the project speaks.

Sofa's version of intellectual responsibility is therefore more demanding than Sartre's: it requires not merely active political engagement but an active political engagement that is continuously critical of the very political forces it supports, willing to identify and name the corruptions and failures of allies as well as opponents, and ultimately loyal to principles rather than to any particular political organization or leadership.

Many literary critics consider Sofa's book "Bangali Musalmaner Mon" to be one of the ten most important works of thought written in Bangla in the past century. As Salimullah Khan explained the context of the essay: "The Bengali Muslim is not actually an ethnic group. It is the name of a particular class, who are Muslims and speak Bangla, and who suffer from an inferiority complex because of it. Even though times have changed, the crisis of this inferiority complex has not been resolved. This is why the poor state of the Bangla language at all levels still persists." [Views Bangladesh](#)

2.4 The Mind of the Bengali Muslim: A Philosophical Analysis

Sofa's "Bangali Musalmaner Man" is not simply a sociological or historical study. It is a philosophical text of the first order, a work that deploys historical, sociological, and psychological analysis in the service of a fundamental philosophical inquiry into the nature of cultural identity and the conditions of genuine self-determination.

The text begins with a challenge to the very category of Bengali Muslim identity. Sofa argues that this category, while real in its social and psychological effects, does not correspond to a natural or essential kind. Bengali Muslims are not a community with a single, coherent, and continuously transmitted identity stretching back to the first conversions from Hinduism and Buddhism. They are, rather, the product of a series of historical processes, some forced and some voluntary, some creative and some destructive, through which a diverse population of social groups was gradually incorporated into an Islamic cultural framework while retaining, in transformed and sometimes unconscious forms, much of the cultural content of their previous identities.

The most philosophically significant dimension of this analysis is Sofa's account of the psychological consequences of this historical formation. Bengali Muslims, in his analysis, suffer from a distinctive form of cultural anxiety: an anxiety rooted in the sense that their identity is not quite genuine, that it is neither fully Bengali (because Bengali cultural identity has been defined in ways that privilege Hindu cultural forms) nor fully Islamic (because their Islam is too deeply inflected by pre-Islamic Bengali cultural forms to satisfy the demands of universalist Islamic identity). This cultural anxiety, this sense of occupying an in-between space that belongs fully to neither of the cultural traditions it draws on, generates the inferiority complex that Sofa identifies as the central psychological formation of Bengali Muslim consciousness.

Sofa began his seminal work by asking what a Brahmin family was doing in the middle of the desert in the Arab world in a Bengali folk tale, arguing that this story speaks directly to the anxiety that Bengali Muslims carried with them, offering a miracle, a salvation and a literary victory over the caste that had historically ruled over them for centuries. [The Daily Star](#)

This psychoanalytically inflected cultural analysis is connected to Sofa's broader political argument in the following way. A community suffering from an inferiority complex is a community that cannot effectively exercise genuine self-determination. The inferiority complex produces a politics of imitation and dependency: the attempt to gain recognition and validation from others by demonstrating conformity to their standards rather than by asserting the value of one's own cultural forms and intellectual traditions. In the context of Bangladeshi intellectual life, this manifests as the valorization of Western theoretical frameworks, the devaluation of indigenous intellectual traditions, and the orientation of intellectual work toward audiences in the global North rather than toward the actual intellectual needs of Bangladeshi society.

Sofa's prescription is not separatism or cultural nationalism of the defensive and restrictive kind. It is not an argument for closing off Bengali Muslim culture from global intellectual exchange. It is an argument for approaching that exchange from a position of genuine self-confidence rather than of anxious imitation: engaging with the full range of global intellectual resources, including Western critical theory, Islamic philosophy, and the various other traditions that have contributed to human understanding, from a position of settled cultural identity that does not need external validation to be secure.

2.5 The 1992 Essay: Elites, the Masses, and Social Revolution

Ahmed Sofa's 1992 essay "Bangladesher Uchubitto Sreni Ebong Somajbiplob Proshongo" (On the Issue of Bangladesh's Upper Class and a Social Revolution) represents a development and deepening of the analysis he began in "Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas" twenty years earlier. Where the earlier work focused primarily on the intellectual class, the later essay extends the analysis to the broader structure of elite-mass relations in Bangladesh.

In this essay, Sofa made the point that the nexus of urban elites had zero ties with the large swathes of poor and struggling people across the country. They feign to feel more foreign here than foreigners themselves. They aspire to identify with a western cultural existence which has no roots in the realities of the millions in this country. Sofa attributed the causes of the religious

and secular dichotomies to the absence of a concerted effort for dialogue from the elites. [Wikipedia](#)

This analysis is more sociologically precise than the earlier work and more directly connected to structural conditions. The elite-mass disconnect that Sofa identifies is not merely a matter of cultural difference or intellectual preference. It is rooted in the material conditions that shape elite and mass experience: the spatial segregation of upper-class residential areas from working-class and poor neighborhoods, the educational segregation between elite schools and mass public education, the linguistic segregation between English-medium and Bengali-medium professional cultures, and the economic segregation between the formal and informal sectors of the economy.

These structural conditions produce not merely cultural distance but mutual incomprehension. The Bangladeshi elite does not merely have different cultural preferences from the majority of the population: it lives in a different experiential world, encounters different problems, speaks a different primary language, and has access to a very different range of resources for understanding and navigating social life. The political consequences of this mutual incomprehension are severe: a political class that does not genuinely understand the conditions of the majority it claims to represent cannot make adequate policy for that majority, however well-intentioned it may be.

The most important application of this analysis, from the perspective of this textbook, concerns the question of democracy and its conditions. Genuine democratic governance requires not merely formal institutions of representative government, elections, parliaments, and courts, but a political culture in which elites and masses share a sufficient common framework of understanding to make meaningful democratic deliberation possible. Where elites and masses inhabit radically different experiential and cultural worlds, the formal institutions of democracy are likely to be captured by elite interests and used to legitimate those interests rather than to represent the actual diversity of popular interests and perspectives.

2.6 Sofa's Literary Philosophy: The Novel as Social Analysis

Sofa's understanding of the relationship between literary fiction and social analysis is a dimension of his intellectual work that has been insufficiently appreciated in academic discussions that focus primarily on his essays and political writings. His novels are not merely literary productions that happen to engage with social and political themes. They are deliberate philosophical experiments in the use of narrative form as a mode of social and cultural analysis that complements and in some respects exceeds what purely discursive analysis can achieve.

Sofa's fictions portrayed Bangladesh with all its social, spiritual and political nuances. Critics acclaimed his intricate characterization depicting psychological and sociocultural subtleties with realism. [Wikipedia](#)

The philosophical significance of narrative fiction as a mode of social analysis lies in its capacity to represent the concrete particularity of social life in ways that abstract analytical prose cannot. Social analysis necessarily deals with generalizations: patterns, tendencies, structural conditions that shape the behavior of many individuals across many situations. But social life is always

lived in the particular: in specific encounters between specific individuals in specific situations, with all the irreducible complexity and contingency that particularity entails. Narrative fiction can hold both the general and the particular simultaneously, representing the structural conditions of social life through the concrete particularity of individual experience and individual choice.

"Gabhi Bittanta" is the clearest example of this literary-philosophical method at work. The novel's satirical account of university politics in Bangladesh uses the story of a single cow to illuminate the structural dynamics of institutional politics in Bangladesh: the way in which the formal purposes of institutions (in this case, the university's purpose of advancing knowledge and education) are systematically subverted by the informal politics of patronage, faction, and personal advantage that actually govern institutional behavior. The choice of a cow as the central narrative device is philosophically brilliant: the cow's literal-minded incomprehension of the human political games being played around it serves as a defamiliarizing device that makes visible the absurdity of those games in a way that direct satirical commentary could not achieve as effectively.

Gabi Bittanta is considered one of the most powerful novels in Bengali language, especially written in the context of teachers' monopolies in the universities of Bangladesh. It is used as a reference when discussing university politics. Sofa says in the novel: "The oldest and most prestigious university of our country has taken such a termagant look in recent times, it is not at all safe to live here with one's honour intact." [New Age](#)

This formulation is itself a masterpiece of compressed social analysis. The phrase "not safe to live here with one's honour intact" points to the fundamental problem of institutional corruption: that the social pressures within corrupt institutions are so powerful that maintaining personal integrity requires active resistance, rather than merely avoiding temptation. The university, precisely because it is the institution most formally committed to the values of intellectual honesty and independent inquiry, is, in Sofa's analysis, the institution most dramatically corrupted by the political pressures that undermine those values.

2.7 Sofa's Critique of Religious Orthodoxy and Political Islam

Ahmed Sofa's engagement with Islam and its role in Bangladeshi political and social life is one of the most complex and most consequential dimensions of his intellectual work. He was neither simply a secularist who rejected the political significance of Islam nor a religious apologist who defended Islamic institutions from criticism. He was a rigorous and sometimes harsh critic of the forms that Islamic religious authority took in Bangladesh while also being a genuine appreciator of the deeper spiritual and ethical resources of the Islamic tradition.

In one notable instance, Sofa directly challenged the sermons of Delwar Hossain Sayeedi, questioning their alignment with Islamic principles and accusing clerical elites of abandoning the pursuit of knowledge, which he argued precluded societal progress. Such interventions framed him as an opponent of religious orthodoxy, with detractors from fundamentalist perspectives viewing his emphasis on empirical inquiry and criticism of extremism as tantamount to undermining faith itself. [Grokopedia](#)

Sayeedi was one of the most powerful Islamic preachers in Bangladesh, associated with the Jamaat-e-Islami party, and Sofa's challenge to his authority was an act of considerable personal courage. It was also a philosophically significant act: a demonstration that Islamic authority claims, like all authority claims, must be subject to rational scrutiny, and that compliance with an authority claim cannot be adequate ground for compliance in the absence of genuine understanding of the claim's content and basis.

Sofa's critique of political Islam in Bangladesh was informed by a distinction he drew between authentic Islamic spirituality and culture, which he saw as a genuine and valuable dimension of Bengali Muslim life, and organized Islamic political movements, which he saw as often using the authority of religion to advance political and economic interests that had little to do with genuine Islamic values. This distinction is philosophically important because it allows for a critique of specific religious institutions and movements without amounting to a critique of the religious tradition itself.

The contemporary relevance of this distinction in the post-2024 political context of Bangladesh is profound. The July 2024 uprising brought together a coalition of forces that included secular students, Islamic organizations, and many other groups united primarily by their opposition to the Hasina regime's authoritarianism. The question of what role Islamic political forces should play in the new political settlement, and how a democratic polity should relate to religious authority claims, is one of the most urgent and contested questions in contemporary Bangladesh. Sofa's analytical framework, with its insistence on distinguishing authentic religious values from political manipulation of religious symbols, provides an indispensable resource for thinking through these questions.

2.8 Sofa's Last Years: Prophetic Vision and Exhaustion

The final years of Ahmed Sofa's life, from the mid-1990s until his death on July 28, 2001, were characterized by an intensification of both his critical vision and his sense of personal and cultural exhaustion. He continued to write, to organize, to engage with the intellectual and political life of Bangladesh with undiminished energy, but with a growing sense that the structural problems he had been identifying and analyzing for three decades were proving far more resistant to change than he had hoped.

In his lifetime, many labeled him a rebel, a bohemian, or irreverent and critical toward the establishment. He had an anti-establishment mindset that led him to reject the Lekhak Shibir Award in 1975 and the Bangla Academy's Sadat Ali Akhand Award in 1993. It is also heard that he once declined to meet the Prime Minister despite being summoned. [Views Bangladesh](#)

The refusal to meet the Prime Minister is a remarkable biographical detail that illuminates both Sofa's intellectual independence and the social dynamics of Bangladeshi cultural life. In a context where proximity to political power is one of the most coveted forms of social capital, where the ability to say "I met the Prime Minister" conveys enormous social prestige, and where refusal to respond to a political summons is an act of considerable personal risk, Sofa's refusal represents an extraordinary assertion of intellectual autonomy. It says, in effect, that the intellectual's obligation is not to power but to truth, and that the intellectual who arranges their

life around access to political authority has already compromised the independence that gives intellectual work its value.

CHAPTER THREE: SALIMULLAH KHAN'S PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM

Lacan, Marx, Fanon, and the Psychoanalysis of Postcolonial Bangladesh

3.1 The Theoretical Architecture

Salimullah Khan's philosophical system is the most explicitly theoretical of the three figures' intellectual contributions. It is built on a framework that integrates several major theoretical traditions: Marxist political economy, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Fanonian postcolonial theory, and the broader tradition of critical theory associated with the Frankfurt School and its successors. Understanding how these traditions are integrated, and what new analytical capacities emerge from their integration, is essential for grasping both the power and the limitations of Khan's intellectual project.

The integration is not eclectic in the pejorative sense of simply combining incompatible frameworks without attention to their tensions and contradictions. Khan is deeply aware of the tensions among the traditions he draws on and has thought carefully about how they can be made to work together without collapsing into incoherence. The key move is to treat each tradition as illuminating a different dimension of social reality: Marxist political economy illuminates the structural conditions of material life and how they shape political possibilities; Lacanian psychoanalysis illuminates the subjective dimensions of political life, how structural conditions are internalized, transformed, and expressed in the desires, fantasies, and self-understandings of social actors; and Fanonian postcolonial theory illuminates the specifically colonial and postcolonial dimensions of both structural conditions and subjective formations.

Together, these three dimensions of analysis provide a far richer account of Bangladeshi social and political life than any single theoretical framework could produce independently. The Marxist dimension reveals the structural conditions of dependency, exploitation, and inequality that shape the field of political possibilities in Bangladesh. The Lacanian dimension reveals the psychological formations through which these structural conditions are internalized: the divided subjectivities, the misrecognitions, the fantasies that sustain the existing social order. And the Fanonian dimension reveals the colonial and postcolonial specificity of these formations: the ways in which colonialism damaged the consciousness of the colonized in ways that continued to structure social and psychological life long after formal political independence.

3.2 Lacan in Bangladesh: The Divided Subject and Political Life

The application of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to the analysis of political life is not new: it was developed by a range of European and North American thinkers, including Slavoj Žižek, Yannis Stavrakakis, and others, in the late twentieth century. Khan's distinctive contribution is to bring this analytical tradition to bear on the specific conditions of a postcolonial South Asian

society, and to integrate it with the Marxist political economy tradition in ways that address the materialist critiques that Lacanian social theory has sometimes attracted.

The central Lacanian concept that Khan deploys most extensively is the concept of the "divided subject": the Lacanian claim that the subject of desire is never unified or transparent to itself, but is always constituted through processes of identification and misrecognition that produce a split between what the subject consciously believes about itself and what it actually desires and does. The subject's self-understanding is always a retrospective construction that misrepresents the actual dynamics of its desires and identifications.

The political implications of this analysis are profound. If political subjects are divided and their self-understandings are systematically misleading, then the standard liberal-democratic assumption that political deliberation can proceed through rational dialogue among transparent, self-knowing subjects is deeply problematic. People do not know what they want in any simple or direct sense. Their stated political preferences are shaped by ideological formations that serve interests they are not aware of, by fantasies that distort their understanding of social reality, and by identifications that may be deeply at odds with their genuine material interests.

Citing Freud and Lacan, Khan argued that the people of the ruling class are perverse since their acts and thoughts do not reflect their words. He called them traitors to the nation. [Wikipedia](#)

The term "perverse" here requires careful explanation. In Lacanian theory, perversion is a specific structure of the relationship to knowledge and enjoyment in which the subject knows the truth, or at least knows what the truth would look like, but acts in ways that deny it, maintaining a split between what it officially endorses and what it actually does. The ruling class's official endorsement of Bengali as the national language combined with its actual preference for English in all high-status contexts is, in Khan's analysis, a paradigm case of this perverse structure: the ruling class knows that Bengali is the language of the nation, officially endorses this knowledge in constitutional and symbolic forms, but derives its class advantage from the practical privileging of English that it maintains in all the domains that actually matter for the reproduction of its class position.

This analysis is more powerful than a simple accusation of hypocrisy because it points to the structural function that the split serves. The official endorsement of Bengali serves the ideological function of legitimating the ruling class's claim to represent the nation, while the practical privileging of English serves the material function of reproducing the class advantage that distinguishes ruling class children from working-class and poor children in competition for educational and professional opportunities. The split between official endorsement and practical privileging is not an accidental inconsistency: it is a structural requirement of the ruling class's position, and it will be maintained as long as that position is maintained.

3.3 The Concept of Behat Biplab: The Diverted Revolution

One of Khan's most important contributions to the analysis of Bangladeshi political history is his concept of "Behat Biplab" (Diverted Revolution), which gives its name to his major work on the Liberation War of 1971. The concept captures the paradox that a revolutionary event of the first

order, the liberation of Bangladesh, produced political consequences that were profoundly at odds with the revolutionary principles that animated it.

In his book *Behat Biplab*, Khan analyzed the strategic and political aspects of the liberation war of Bangladesh, arguing that the three fundamental principles of the liberation war are equality, human dignity, and social justice. [Wikipedia](#)

The concept of a diverted revolution raises fundamental questions about the relationship between revolutionary ideals and revolutionary outcomes. Why do revolutions so often produce outcomes that betray the principles that animated them? What mechanisms divert revolutionary energies from their intended goals? And what conditions would need to be in place for a revolution to achieve its stated principles rather than merely changing the identity of those who exercise power?

Khan's answers to these questions draw on all three dimensions of his theoretical framework. At the Marxist level, revolutions are diverted by the structural conditions of the society in which they occur: the class interests that pre-existed the revolution, the institutional frameworks through which power is exercised, and the economic dependencies that constrain political possibilities all tend to reassert themselves after the immediate revolutionary moment has passed. At the Lacanian level, revolutions are diverted by the psychological formations of the revolutionary subjects themselves: the fantasies through which they understood what they were fighting for, the identifications that shaped their vision of the post-revolutionary order, and the misrecognitions that led them to believe that changing political leadership was equivalent to the social transformation they desired. At the Fanonian level, revolutions in postcolonial societies face the specific challenge that the most mobilized and organizationally capable social groups are often those who have most extensively internalized colonial cultural hierarchies: the educated middle classes whose energy and organizational capacity made the revolution possible but whose class interests ultimately led them to divert revolutionary energies toward the consolidation of their own position rather than the genuine transformation of the social order.

The application of this analysis to the specific history of Bangladesh after 1971 is one of Khan's most important analytical contributions. He argues that the Liberation War mobilized energies and aspirations for genuine social transformation that were then systematically diverted by the political dynamics of the post-independence period: the reconstitution of the political class around the figures and families that had led the independence movement, the restoration of the colonial-era bureaucratic and legal institutions under new political management, and the orientation of economic policy toward the interests of an emerging comprador bourgeoisie rather than toward the genuine development needs of the majority.

3.4 The Decolonization Project: What It Actually Requires

Khan's analysis of the colonial and postcolonial dimensions of Bangladesh's political and cultural life leads to a comprehensive theory of what genuine decolonization would require. This theory is more demanding and more comprehensive than most discussions of decolonization, because it attends to multiple levels of social life simultaneously: the economic, the institutional, the cultural, the linguistic, and the psychological.

At the economic level, genuine decolonization requires the transformation of the relationship between Bangladesh and the global economic system, which continues to structure Bangladesh's economic position in ways that reproduce colonial-era patterns of dependency. Bangladesh's primary economic role in the contemporary global economy is as a low-cost producer of garments for export to wealthy consumers in the global North, a role that generates some economic growth and employment but that maintains Bangladesh in a position of structural vulnerability to the decisions of global capital and to the trade policies of wealthy importing countries.

At the institutional level, genuine decolonization requires the transformation of the legal, educational, and administrative institutions that Bangladesh inherited from the colonial period and that continue to reproduce colonial-era hierarchies and power structures. The legal system that operates primarily in English, the educational system that privileged English-medium instruction, and the bureaucratic system that was designed to administer a colonial province rather than to serve the citizens of a democratic state all require fundamental transformation.

At the cultural level, genuine decolonization requires the development of a self-confident Bengali cultural identity that neither imitates Western cultural forms nor retreats into defensive traditionalism, but draws creatively on the full range of cultural resources available to Bengali Muslim society: the Bengali literary tradition, the Islamic intellectual tradition, the Sufi philosophical and musical tradition, and the engagement with global intellectual currents that the contemporary world makes available.

Khan critiques English-dominant educational systems in postcolonial contexts like Bangladesh for reinforcing elite hierarchies through a persistent colonial mindset. He links this systemic bias to broader cultural imperialism, where English-medium dominance sustains an epistemic divide: urban elites accrue symbolic capital for global integration, while rural and lower-class populations face barriers to foundational knowledge, perpetuating dependency on imported paradigms rather than indigenous causal reasoning. [Grokipedia](#)

At the psychological level, genuine decolonization requires the transformation of the subjective formations that colonialism produced: the inferiority complex that Sofa identified in "Bangali Musalmaner Man" and that Khan analyzes in Lacanian terms as a structural feature of the colonized subject's relationship to knowledge, desire, and authority. This psychological transformation is, in Khan's analysis, the most difficult and the most fundamental of the tasks that decolonization requires, because it cannot be achieved by institutional reform alone but requires a transformation of the very structure of desire and self-understanding that shapes how people relate to knowledge, authority, and cultural value.

3.5 Khan's North South University Move: Institutional Dimensions

Khan was the director of the Centre for Advanced Theory at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh. Currently he works as a faculty member in the Department of History and Philosophy at North South University. [Wikipedia](#)

This institutional transition from ULAB to North South University, which appears to have taken place after 2024, is itself a detail worth examining for what it reveals about Khan's positioning in the contemporary Bangladeshi intellectual landscape. North South University is one of Bangladesh's largest and most prominent private universities, with a distinctly different institutional culture from ULAB. Its student body is primarily drawn from upper-middle-class families, it has a strong orientation toward professional education and international certification, and its institutional culture is significantly more oriented toward English-medium instruction and global professional norms than ULAB's more humanistically oriented environment.

Khan's decision to move to this institution, if indeed it was his own decision rather than an institutional change imposed by circumstance, raises interesting questions about his strategy for intellectual influence. Moving to an institution that serves precisely the English-medium upper-middle class whose cultural and linguistic practices he has consistently criticized might seem paradoxical. But it can also be read as a deliberate strategy: bringing the critique of colonial linguistic hierarchies directly into the institutional space where those hierarchies are most confidently reproduced, confronting the students who will become the next generation of Bangladeshi elite professionals with an analysis of the privileges and responsibilities that their class position entails.

The Bangladesh Future Forum 2026 featured Salimullah Khan as a prominent speaker, indicating that despite institutional transitions, he remains a central figure in national and international conversations about Bangladesh's political and intellectual future. [Bangladeshfutureforum](#)

3.6 Khan on Kazi Nazrul Islam: The Anti-Colonial Democratic Thinker

One of Khan's important and sometimes overlooked intellectual contributions is his sustained effort to reinterpret and re-evaluate the legacy of Kazi Nazrul Islam, the "rebel poet" of Bengal whose significance for Bangladeshi national identity is acknowledged but whose philosophical and political thought has been less systematically analyzed.

Khan views Kazi Nazrul Islam as an anti-colonial and democratic thinker cherished dearly by the people of Bengal. [Wikipedia](#)

This characterization is significant because it positions Nazrul not merely as a poet of emotional intensity and creative brilliance but as a thinker whose engagement with questions of anti-colonial resistance, democratic equality, and religious pluralism constitutes a genuine philosophical and political legacy. Khan's reading of Nazrul emphasizes the poet's consistent commitment to the equal dignity of all human beings regardless of religion, caste, or class: a commitment that expressed itself in Nazrul's celebration of Hindu-Muslim unity, his fury at the caste system, his solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, and his rejection of all forms of religious or political authority that claimed the right to diminish human dignity.

In Khan's reading, Nazrul represents one of the most important indigenous intellectual resources for the project of genuine decolonization in Bangladesh: a thinker who developed, from within the specific cultural conditions of Bengal, a vision of human equality and dignity that anticipates and in some respects surpasses the equivalent visions developed within the Western liberal and

socialist traditions. The appropriation of this resource, rather than the uncritical importation of Western frameworks, is part of what Khan understands by the project of intellectual decolonization.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE THREE SYSTEMS IN CONFRONTATION

Agreement, Disagreement, and the Productive Tensions of a Living Tradition

4.1 The Convergences

Despite the significant differences in method, temperament, and theoretical toolkit, the three figures share a set of fundamental intellectual commitments that define the tradition they collectively represent.

The first and most fundamental commitment is to intellectual independence as the supreme intellectual virtue. All three figures, in their very different ways, understood the intellectual's primary obligation as an obligation to honest inquiry and truthful speech rather than to political allegiance, institutional loyalty, or social conformity. This commitment manifests differently in each case: Razzaq through his deliberate cultivation of indirectness and his refusal of political alignment; Sofa through his fierce public declarations and his principled rejection of establishment recognition; Khan through his deployment of critical theory in the service of political critique that challenges all political forces, not merely his opponents.

The second shared commitment is to the welfare of ordinary Bengali Muslim people as the ultimate standard against which intellectual and political work should be evaluated. All three figures understood themselves as engaged, ultimately, on behalf of a majority that has been consistently marginalized, misrepresented, and exploited by elites of various kinds, and all three understood the intellectual's responsibility as including a responsibility to this majority that cannot be discharged by purely academic work.

The third shared commitment is to the importance of historical understanding as a condition of adequate political analysis. All three figures insisted that the political conditions of present-day Bangladesh cannot be adequately understood without understanding the historical processes, colonial, partition-era, liberation-war-era, that shaped them. This historical consciousness distinguishes their work from the ahistorical approaches to political analysis that dominated mainstream political science during most of the period in which they were working.

4.2 The Deepest Disagreements

The most fundamental disagreements among the three figures concern questions of method rather than questions of substantive political commitment. They largely agreed about what the problems were. They disagreed significantly about how to analyze them and how to respond to them.

Razzaq's indirectness versus Sofa's directness is the most visible dimension of methodological disagreement. Sofa's critique of Razzaq's preference for oblique communication, his desire for a more politically direct and committed intellectual engagement, reflects a genuine philosophical disagreement about what intellectual work is for and how it achieves its effects. Razzaq believed that the most powerful intellectual contribution is the one that forms minds capable of independent analysis rather than the one that delivers pre-formed conclusions. Sofa believed that in conditions of urgent political crisis, the intellectual's responsibility is to say clearly and powerfully what needs to be said, even at the cost of nuance and complexity.

Khan's theoretical sophistication versus Sofa's accessible directness represents a second dimension of methodological tension. Sofa wrote for a general educated audience in Bengali, aiming to reach and mobilize the broad constituency of Bengali Muslim intellectuals and students who might be influenced by a passionate and clear-eyed analysis of their society's condition. Khan writes for a theoretically sophisticated audience capable of engaging with Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist political economy, aiming to produce rigorous analytical frameworks that can withstand critical scrutiny from the most demanding theoretical perspectives. Both are legitimate intellectual strategies, but they serve somewhat different purposes and are directed at somewhat different audiences.

Ahmed Sofa was critical of Khan's evaluation of Razzaq in his first book, suggesting that even within the tradition of discipleship there were significant interpretive disagreements about how Razzaq's legacy should be understood and applied. [Alchetron](#)

4.3 The Controversy Over Rabindranath Tagore

One of the most persistent controversies in the intellectual tradition we are examining concerns the figure of Rabindranath Tagore, the towering presence of Bengali literary and cultural life whose influence on Bengali intellectual culture has been immense and whose relationship to Bengali Muslim cultural identity is complex and sometimes antagonistic.

Sofa's relationship to Tagore was one of admiration combined with significant critical distance. He admired Tagore's literary genius, his humanistic vision, and his contribution to the development of the Bengali language as a literary medium. But he was also critical of the ways in which Tagore's cultural vision had been used to define Bengali cultural identity in ways that marginalized Muslim cultural forms and experiences. Tagore's Bengal was predominantly a Hindu Bengal, drawing on Sanskrit and Brahmanical cultural resources that were not equally available to or valued by Bengali Muslim communities. The canonization of Tagore as the supreme expression of Bengali cultural achievement had the effect, in Sofa's analysis, of positioning Bengali Muslim cultural forms as inherently secondary and derivative.

Khan's engagement with Tagore is similarly complex. Khan has been critical of certain prescriptions on Bengali orthography, which connects to debates about Tagore's influence on the standardization of Bengali. [Tritiyomatra](#) His critique is focused on the institutional and normative consequences of Tagore's prescriptions: the ways in which a particular form of Bengali, the educated Calcutta Bengali inflected by Tagore's literary aesthetics and his

orthographic preferences, became the standard against which all other forms of Bengali were implicitly measured and found wanting.

This controversy is not merely about literary aesthetics. It is about the relationship between cultural standards and social hierarchies, about who gets to define what counts as proper Bengali, and about whether the cultural norms that govern Bengali literary and intellectual life serve the genuine diversity of Bengali experience or serve primarily the interests of particular social and cultural elites. In the context of Bangladesh, where the majority Muslim population has historically been positioned as culturally inferior relative to the Hindu-dominated high culture of Calcutta, this controversy is directly connected to the broader political and philosophical questions about self-determination and genuine decolonization that are at the center of the tradition we are examining.

CHAPTER FIVE: POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND ITS APPLICATIONS

Democracy, Justice, and the Conditions of Genuine Political Life in Bangladesh

5.1 The Failure of Formal Democracy: Three Diagnoses

All three figures have engaged extensively with the question of why formal democratic institutions have so consistently failed to produce genuine democratic governance in Bangladesh. Their diagnoses, while overlapping in some respects, also differ in ways that reflect their different theoretical emphases.

Razzaq's diagnosis focuses on the structural conditions of Bangladeshi society that make formal democracy inadequate. The weakness of autonomous civil society organizations, the dependence of rural communities on patron-client networks for access to essential services, the dominance of personal loyalty over programmatic commitment in political organization, and the absence of the economic independence that genuine political agency requires all create conditions in which formal democratic institutions are easily captured by elite interests and used to legitimate rather than constrain elite power.

Sofa's diagnosis focuses on the intellectual and cultural conditions: the failure of Bangladeshi intellectuals to perform their proper function as honest critics of power, the opportunistic alignment of cultural authority with political authority, and the consequent impoverishment of public discourse that leaves citizens without the honest information and analysis they need to make genuinely informed political choices.

Khan's diagnosis operates at all three levels simultaneously. At the structural level, he points to the colonial and postcolonial economic conditions that have created a dependent capitalism incapable of generating the broad-based prosperity that genuine democratic citizenship requires. At the cultural level, he points to the linguistic and epistemological hierarchies that exclude the majority of Bangladeshis from meaningful participation in the discourses that govern their lives. And at the psychological level, he points to the subjective formations that the colonial experience

produced, the divided subjects whose self-understanding is structured by misrecognitions that serve the existing power structure.

5.2 The July 2024 Revolution: A Philosophical Reading

The July-August 2024 student-public uprising in Bangladesh began with a call for government job quota reforms but swiftly evolved into a profound challenge to the political status quo. What started as a protest over quotas transformed into a broader movement for regime change and reshaped Bangladesh's political landscape. [Countercurrents](#)

The reading of the July 2024 revolution through the philosophical frameworks of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan reveals dimensions of the event that more straightforwardly political analyses tend to miss.

From Razzaq's perspective, the uprising confirms his longstanding analysis of the structural instability of dynastic political systems. The central critique of the quota system was that it functioned as a form of political patronage increasingly used to consolidate the power of Sheikh Hasina's regime. The Supreme Court's reversal and reinstatement of the freedom-fighter quota seemed to deal the final blow to the long-standing demands students had mobilized around. [LPE Project](#) This was precisely the kind of institutionalization of dynastic political advantage that Razzaq had identified as a structural threat to genuine democratic governance: the use of formal legal mechanisms to create privileged access to state resources for those associated with the ruling family's political network.

From Sofa's perspective, the uprising confirms his analysis of the relationship between intellectual opportunism and political catastrophe. The gradual consolidation of the Hasina government's authoritarianism between 2009 and 2024 was facilitated, in Sofa's analytical framework, by the failure of the intellectual class to provide honest critical analysis of what was happening. The systematic co-optation of intellectuals through appointments, awards, and access to patronage, combined with the intimidation of those who refused co-optation, produced exactly the kind of intellectual climate that Sofa had warned against in 1972: a climate in which the problems were visible but no one in a position of institutional authority was willing to name them clearly.

From Khan's perspective, the uprising can be read as an expression of the structural contradictions that his Lacanian-Marxist framework predicts. The July 2024 uprising reflected not only policy-related grievances but also deep-rooted frustrations over inequality, governance, and generational exclusion. The movement transcended one-issue protests and became an oriented movement toward the mass offering to achieve democratic accountability, equity, and systemic change. [ScienceDirect](#) The students who led the movement were expressing not merely frustration at a specific policy but a more fundamental rejection of the political system's claim to represent them: a rejection, in Lacanian terms, of the fantasy through which the political system had been legitimating itself.

The invocation of the Liberation War's legacy by both sides of the conflict is particularly revealing from Khan's perspective. The Hasina government's claim to represent the true heirs of

the Liberation War, and the students' rejection of this claim as an ideological instrument used to suppress legitimate dissent, replays in compressed form the dynamics that Khan has analyzed in "Behat Biplab": the use of the Liberation War's symbolic authority to legitimate a particular political project and to delegitimize those who question it.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina made a controversial statement comparing the protesters to Razakars, the traitors in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. This comment, widely perceived as an insult, ignited widespread outrage. [Countercurrents](#) In Khan's analytical framework, this invocation of the Razakar accusation is a paradigmatic example of the ideological use of historical memory: the attempt to silence legitimate political dissent by associating it with the most despised figures in Bangladesh's national mythology. The students' rejection of this ideological maneuver, their refusal to accept that criticism of the current government constitutes betrayal of the Liberation War's legacy, represents exactly the kind of ideological demystification that Khan's critical theory aims to facilitate.

5.3 The Post-Revolution Political Landscape and Its Philosophical Challenges

The July Revolution of 2024, often referred to as Bangladesh's second independence, stands as a defining moment in the nation's political history. Unlike previous power struggles dominated by traditional political parties, this revolution was led by the youth. In the aftermath, a student-influenced interim government took charge, seeking to restore democratic legitimacy, implement institutional reforms, and rebuild public trust. [Ilke](#)

The intellectual tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan provides a powerful analytical framework for understanding not merely the causes of the 2024 uprising but also the challenges that face the post-revolution political order. Several of these challenges deserve specific philosophical analysis.

The first challenge is the problem of institutional reconstruction. The uprising successfully disrupted the existing political order, but disruption is not the same as transformation. The institutional structures through which power is exercised in Bangladesh, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the security forces, the electoral system, the universities, and the media, are products of long historical processes that cannot be fundamentally transformed by political change at the top of the system, however dramatic. Razzaq's analysis of the structural conditions that shape political possibilities is particularly relevant here: the challenge is not merely to create new institutions but to transform the underlying social and cultural conditions that have consistently subverted previously created institutions.

The second challenge is the management of ideological pluralism in the new political order. The coalition that brought down the Hasina government included forces with very different and sometimes contradictory ideological orientations: secular progressives, Islamic conservatives, Bengali nationalists, and many others united primarily by opposition to authoritarianism but divided by substantive disagreements about the kind of society Bangladesh should become. Sofa's analysis of the intellectual class's responsibility to facilitate honest democratic debate rather than serving as advocates for any particular faction is directly relevant to this challenge.

The third challenge, which connects directly to Khan's analysis, is the challenge of preventing the new political order from simply reconstituting the old patterns under new management. The structural conditions that produced the dynastic politics, the intellectual opportunism, and the colonial cultural hierarchies that the uprising rejected have not been eliminated by the uprising. The economic dependencies, the institutional frameworks, the class structures, and the psychological formations that underlie those patterns remain in place and will reassert themselves unless actively and systematically addressed.

The July Revolution of Bangladesh was achieved through 36 days of struggle and the sacrifice of countless young lives. This victory achieved what powerful political parties had failed to accomplish. It was the triumph of the student and public uprising. [RSIS International](#)

The philosophical tradition we are examining would add to this celebration a note of caution: the history of Bangladesh is a history of moments of liberation that were followed by reconstitution of the old patterns in new forms. The work of genuine political transformation is not accomplished in thirty-six days of street protest, however heroic. It is accomplished, or not accomplished, in the decades of patient institutional, cultural, and intellectual labor that follow the moment of political possibility.

CHAPTER SIX: THE JURISPRUDENCE OF DISSENT

Law, Truth, and the Philosophy of Political Accountability

6.1 The Law and Its Discontents

The relationship between formal law and genuine justice is one of the most persistent themes in the political philosophy of all three figures. All three are deeply skeptical of what might be called constitutional fetishism: the belief that adequate legal forms can by themselves produce just political outcomes, regardless of the social and cultural conditions within which those forms operate.

Razzaq's skepticism about constitutional fetishism was expressed primarily through his analysis of the repeated failures of constitutional governance in South Asia. The constitutional frameworks created at independence in both India and Pakistan, and the constitutional framework created in Bangladesh in 1972, were formal elaborations of democratic principles that proved consistently vulnerable to circumvention by powerful political actors when doing so served their interests. The lesson Razzaq drew from this history was not that constitutions are unimportant but that constitutions are only as strong as the political culture that supports them: a political culture in which elites believe that constitutional norms can be suspended when inconvenient will consistently produce governments that suspend them when inconvenient.

Sofa's jurisprudential skepticism was directed more specifically at the gap between the formal equality before the law that Bangladesh's constitution proclaimed and the substantive inequality that characterized the actual operation of the legal system. The poor, the uneducated, and those

without political connections experienced the legal system primarily as an instrument of the powerful rather than as a protection of the weak. The formal equality of legal rights was undermined at every point by the structural inequalities that shaped the ability of different social groups to exercise those rights: the cost of legal representation, the time required to pursue legal remedies, the cultural inaccessibility of a legal system operating in a language that the majority of the population did not speak fluently, and the corruption that allowed the powerful to purchase favorable outcomes.

Khan's jurisprudential analysis adds to these critiques the specifically colonial dimension. Bangladesh's legal system is, in its fundamental architecture, a colonial legal system: created by British colonial administrators to serve colonial administrative purposes, organized around concepts derived from English common law and equity traditions, and operating through procedures and in a language that reflected colonial cultural hierarchies rather than the cultural realities of the colonized population. The formal independence of 1971 changed the identity of the administrators of this system but not its fundamental structure or its cultural orientation.

6.2 Truth Commissions, War Crimes, and the Limits of Legal Accountability

The International Crimes Tribunal established by the Hasina government to address crimes committed during the Liberation War of 1971 represents one of the most complex and contested jurisprudential experiments in Bangladeshi history. All three figures in the tradition we are examining had, in various ways, engaged with the question of how Bangladesh should address the crimes of 1971, and their analyses of this question illuminate both the possibilities and the limits of legal mechanisms for addressing historical injustice.

Razzaq's approach to historical accountability was characteristically indirect. He consistently maintained that accurate historical memory of 1971 was important for Bangladesh's national self-understanding, but he was skeptical of attempts to use legal mechanisms to settle what were fundamentally political and historical questions. His concern was that the criminal justice framework, with its requirement of individualized accountability and its binary categories of guilt and innocence, is poorly suited to address the complex collective dynamics of political violence, in which individual acts are embedded in structural conditions and political orders that cannot be adequately captured by individual criminal responsibility.

Sofa, by contrast, was among the most passionate advocates of accountability for 1971 crimes. His position reflected his broader commitment to truth-telling as a political and ethical imperative: the argument that a society cannot genuinely move forward if the crimes of its past are denied, suppressed, or effectively normalized by the absence of accountability. The political integration of figures who had collaborated with Pakistani violence into the mainstream of Bangladeshi political life represented, in his analysis, a fundamental moral failure that corrupted the foundations of the political order.

During the Shahbagh Movement in Dhaka in 2013, Salimullah Khan came out in strong support of the movement, denouncing communal attacks and criticizing Farhad Mazhar's position with regard to the events. [Tritiyomatra](#) Khan's support for the Shahbagh Movement reflected his alignment with Sofa's position on accountability for 1971, but his analysis of the movement's

relationship to the Hasina government's political project was more complex and more critical than his public support might suggest. His consistent argument that the principles of the Liberation War, equality, human dignity, and social justice, had been betrayed by successive Bangladeshi governments, including the Awami League governments that claimed to embody those principles, implied a critique of the selective deployment of 1971 accountability as a political weapon against specific opponents while other violations of the liberation war's principles were overlooked.

6.3 The Philosophical Problem of Political Transition

The problem of political transition, how societies move from authoritarian or semi-authoritarian political arrangements to genuinely democratic ones, is one of the most difficult and practically urgent problems in contemporary political philosophy. Bangladesh's repeated experiences of political transition, from colonial rule to Pakistani authoritarianism to independence, from the Liberation War to the BAKSAL system, from the assassination of Mujibur Rahman to military rule, from military rule to electoral competition, and from the Hasina authoritarianism to the post-2024 political reconstruction, make it one of the world's most extensive living laboratories for the study of political transition.

The philosophical resources of the Razzaq-Sofa-Khan tradition provide a distinctive and valuable perspective on this problem. Several key insights emerge from their analyses.

The first insight is that political transition requires not merely institutional change but cultural change: the transformation of the norms, values, and expectations that govern the exercise of political power and the assessment of political legitimacy. Institutions can be changed relatively quickly, through constitutional revision, electoral reform, and bureaucratic restructuring. But the cultural conditions that determine whether new institutions will be used in genuinely democratic ways or captured by the same elite interests that captured previous institutions change much more slowly, if at all.

The second insight is that intellectual culture plays a crucial role in political transition, for better or worse. A political transition supported by an intellectual culture that consistently holds new power to account, that refuses to trade honest analysis for access and recognition, and that maintains the standard of the original revolutionary principles against the inevitable tendency of new political establishments to compromise and corrupt those principles, has a far better chance of achieving genuine transformation. A political transition in which intellectuals simply redirect their allegiances from the old power to the new power, without any change in their fundamental orientation toward their relationship with power, is likely to produce reconstitution rather than transformation.

The July 2024 uprising in Bangladesh was not merely a policy-related protest but a broader rejection of inequality, governance failure, and generational exclusion. The movement for democratic accountability, equity, and systemic change points toward structural reforms that formal political change alone cannot achieve. [ScienceDirect](#)

The third insight is that the danger of counterrevolution is always present and should always be anticipated. The forces whose interests were served by the old order do not disappear when the old order collapses. They reorganize, adapt, and seek to reassert themselves within the new political framework. The intellectual's responsibility in this context is to continue to identify and analyze these processes of adaptation and reassertion, to prevent the narrative of successful revolution from obscuring the continuing work of structural reproduction.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONTROVERSIES AND THEIR PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Debates That Defined a Tradition

7.1 The Farhad Mazhar Controversy

One of the most significant and sustained controversies involving Salimullah Khan in recent Bangladeshi intellectual history is his long-running and publicly intense debate with the poet, philosopher, and political activist Farhad Mazhar. This debate illuminates both the intellectual landscape of contemporary Bangladesh and some of the deepest questions in the political philosophy of the tradition we are examining.

Farhad Mazhar is a figure of unusual intellectual ambition and controversial political history. He is a poet of genuine distinction, an environmental activist associated with the Nayakrishi agricultural movement, a theorist of what he calls "ecological democracy," and a political thinker whose positions have ranged across much of the ideological spectrum during his career. His relationship with Salimullah Khan has moved through phases of apparent intellectual kinship and sharp public disagreement.

While Khan's views have often been considered to be analogous to Farhad Mazhar's, he has been strongly critical of Mazhar's position in recent years. In a 2011 debate arranged by bdnews24.com, Khan sharply differed from Mazhar on the film Meherjaan. Khan criticized the film's representation of 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. In 2013, in the backdrop of Shahbagh Movement in Dhaka, Salimullah Khan criticized Farhad Mazhar's position with regard to the events. [Tritiyomatra](#)

The Meherjaan controversy, which erupted around a film that presented the 1971 war from a perspective sympathetic to Pakistani soldiers and that depicted sexual and romantic relationships between Pakistani soldiers and Bangladeshi women, is philosophically significant in ways that go beyond the specific film. The controversy raised fundamental questions about historical representation, narrative ethics, and the relationship between artistic freedom and historical accountability. Khan's critique of the film's representation of the war reflected his broader argument that the liberation war's significance as a founding event of Bangladeshi national consciousness imposes specific ethical obligations on how it is represented, obligations that cannot be dissolved by appeals to artistic freedom.

Mazhar's defense of the film, and his subsequent political positions that aligned more closely with Islamic conservative forces, represented in Khan's analysis a trajectory from genuine intellectual dissent toward a political opportunism that used the language of anti-establishment critique to serve reactionary political purposes. This critique is continuous with Sofa's earlier analysis of how intellectual dissent can be co-opted and redirected: the intellectual who begins by challenging the established order from a position of genuine critical independence can, through a series of tactical alignments and political accommodations, end up serving forces whose interests are fundamentally at odds with the principles that originally animated the dissent.

7.2 The Bangla Academy Controversy of 2024-2025

The controversy surrounding Salimullah Khan's receipt of the Bangla Academy Literary Award in 2024 and the subsequent ceremony in 2025 illuminates the tensions between official recognition and intellectual independence that have characterized all three figures' relationships to institutional power.

Salimullah Khan received the Bangla Academy Literary Award in 2024 for outstanding contributions to essays and prose. This prestigious national prize was presented on February 1, 2025 to seven recipients including Khan during a ceremony at the Bangla Academy in Dhaka on the opening day of the Amar Ekushey Book Fair. In May 2025, he was honored with the Selim Al Deen Literary Award by the Feni Sahitto Sabha, recognizing his body of work as a writer, essayist, and public intellectual. [Groklopedia](#)

Reception remains polarized: hailed for intellectual depth in academic and media circles, while facing institutional friction, exemplified by his 2025 complaints of humiliation following the Bangla Academy Literary Award ceremony, where awardees were allegedly treated subserviently. [Groklopedia](#)

This controversy deserves careful philosophical analysis. The Bangla Academy, as Bangladesh's official cultural institution, occupies an ambiguous position in the tradition we are examining. Ahmed Sofa rejected awards from this institution during his lifetime. Salimullah Khan accepted the institution's award while publicly complaining about the way the ceremony was conducted.

The philosophical question this raises is whether accepting official recognition from an institution one has consistently criticized constitutes a form of intellectual compromise. The answer depends on how one understands the relationship between official recognition and intellectual independence. One view, which would be consistent with Sofa's practice, is that accepting official recognition from an institution inevitably implies a degree of endorsement of that institution's authority claims that is incompatible with genuine intellectual independence. On this view, the integrity of the critical intellectual requires the refusal of official recognition, even at the cost of the material and social resources that recognition provides.

The alternative view, which Khan seems to implicitly embrace, is that accepting recognition does not imply endorsement if the intellectual continues to speak critically and honestly about the institutions that provide it. On this view, what matters is not whether one accepts recognition but what one does with the position of influence that recognition creates. The intellectual who

accepts an award and then uses the platform that award provides to continue challenging institutional inadequacy is not compromised but is exercising a form of strategic engagement with power that is compatible with intellectual integrity.

This is a genuine philosophical disagreement, not one that can be resolved by simple appeal to principle. The history of intellectual life provides examples of both strategies succeeding and failing. The question of which strategy is more appropriate in any given context depends on the specific conditions of the intellectual's institutional situation, the specific nature of the institution whose recognition is in question, and the specific political dynamics of the moment.

7.3 The India Question: Khan's 2024-2025 Positions and Their Controversies

Khan's positions on Bangladesh's relationship with India have generated intense controversy in both Bangladesh and India, and these controversies illuminate important philosophical questions about the nature of postcolonial solidarity, regional geopolitics, and the ethics of political analysis in conditions of structural power inequality.

Khan has repeatedly accused India of harboring colonial ambitions toward Bangladesh, framing its regional dominance as an extension of historical hegemony rather than benevolent aid. In a December 3, 2024 interview, Khan asserted that India wants to keep Bangladesh as its colony using the excuse of its helping the country in its war of liberation in 1971. He contended that the 1971 intervention, while pivotal, has been invoked to justify ongoing interference, questioning whether Bangladesh's independence struggle was merely to replace Pakistani colonial rule with Indian subjugation. Khan rejects Indian claims of minority oppression in Bangladesh as fabricated propaganda designed to legitimize external meddling. On April 12, 2025, he criticized these assertions as tools to portray Bangladesh as unstable and in need of Indian oversight. [Grokopedia](#)

These are strong and controversial claims that require careful philosophical evaluation. The question is not whether they are politically convenient or inconvenient, which is ultimately irrelevant to their truth value, but whether they accurately characterize the actual dynamics of the Bangladesh-India relationship.

The structural case for Khan's position is grounded in a well-developed tradition of analysis of Indian regional hegemony that draws on dependency theory, postcolonial theory, and the specific history of South Asian geopolitics. India is the overwhelmingly dominant power in South Asia: economically, militarily, demographically, and diplomatically. Bangladesh, as a small country sharing a land border with India on three sides and depending heavily on access to Indian markets, Indian transit facilities, and Indian political goodwill, is structurally in a position of vulnerability and dependency that shapes the options available to Bangladeshi governments regardless of their political orientation.

The use of the 1971 liberation as a framework for understanding the Bangladesh-India relationship is analytically significant. Khan's argument is not that India was wrong to intervene in 1971 but that the legacy of that intervention has been systematically deployed to create a relationship of permanent political debt that serves Indian interests. The argument is structurally

parallel to the argument he makes about the relationship between colonial history and postcolonial dependency more generally: past assistance, however genuine and however important, does not create a permanent obligation to defer to the interests of the helper in all subsequent situations.

The controversy over Indian minorities claims in Bangladesh, which Khan dismisses as fabricated propaganda, became particularly acute in the aftermath of the July 2024 revolution, when reports of attacks on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh generated significant media attention and diplomatic pressure from India. The philosophical question here is one of epistemic responsibility: how should political analysts evaluate claims about minority oppression in conditions where those claims are being made by a neighboring government with strong strategic interests in the political direction of the country whose minorities are in question? Khan's position is that Indian government claims about Bangladeshi minority oppression should be subjected to the same critical scrutiny as any other interested political claims, and that the mere fact of India making such claims does not constitute evidence of their accuracy.

This position is philosophically defensible even if the specific empirical claims are contested. The principle that political claims should be evaluated critically and that the strategic interests of those making claims are relevant to the weight that should be given to those claims is sound. The question is whether Khan applies this principle consistently or whether he applies different standards to Indian government claims than to other political claims. This is an empirical question about his intellectual practice rather than a philosophical question about the principle itself.

CHAPTER EIGHT: ETHICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE THEORY OF INTELLECTUAL VIRTUE

What It Means to Think Well in Bangladesh

8.1 Aristotle to Badiou: Khan's Ethical Curriculum

Khan's research theme series beginning Spring 2020 was on the topic of Crisis in Contemporary Ethics, and his public lecture course was on the topic of Ethics from Aristotle to Alain Badiou. [Ulab](#)

The trajectory from Aristotle to Badiou suggests the scope and ambition of Khan's ethical thinking. Beginning with Aristotle's virtue ethics and ending with Badiou's contemporary ethics of truth, the curriculum traverses the history of Western ethical thought and culminates in a confrontation with the most challenging contemporary theoretical formulations of what ethics requires.

Aristotelian virtue ethics, which grounds ethical life in the development of stable character dispositions (virtues) through practice and habituation, has particular relevance to the tradition we are examining. All three figures, in their different ways, embodied what might be called

intellectual virtues in the Aristotelian sense: stable dispositions of character that express themselves reliably in intellectual and ethical conduct. Razzaq's cultivated habit of careful, patient inquiry, Sofa's cultivated habit of courageous truth-telling, Khan's cultivated habit of rigorous critical analysis: these are not occasional acts of intellectual virtue but stable character dispositions that express themselves consistently across the full range of intellectual and personal conduct.

Alain Badiou's ethics, developed most systematically in his book "Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil" (1993), provides a very different but complementary perspective. Badiou argues that ethics is not primarily about the prevention of evil (the dominant framework of contemporary bioethics and human rights discourse) but about fidelity to truth: the commitment to pursue a truth that has been encountered, even at the cost of conventional comfort, social approval, and personal advantage. Ethics, on this account, is inseparable from the encounter with genuine novelty, with something that does not fit existing categories and that demands the creation of new ways of understanding.

The resonance of this Badiouian framework with the intellectual practices of all three figures is striking. Razzaq's consistent refusal to reduce complex social realities to the categories of existing theoretical frameworks, Sofa's encounter with the Bengali Muslim condition as a genuinely new problem requiring genuinely new understanding rather than the application of existing frameworks, and Khan's development of the Lacanian-Marxist synthesis as a new theoretical framework adequate to problems that neither existing tradition could adequately address: all of these can be read as instances of the Badiouian ethical practice of fidelity to truth.

8.2 The Moral Economy of Bangladeshi Intellectual Life

The concept of a "moral economy," borrowed from the historian E.P. Thompson's analysis of pre-capitalist forms of economic ethics, can be usefully applied to the analysis of intellectual life in Bangladesh. Thompson argued that pre-capitalist communities operated according to a moral economy: a set of norms about fair dealing, reciprocal obligation, and the limits of legitimate exploitation that shaped economic behavior and provided the basis for collective resistance when those norms were violated.

Analogously, Bangladeshi intellectual life operates according to a moral economy of intellectual obligation and reciprocal loyalty that is rarely made explicit but that powerfully shapes intellectual behavior. The dominant norms of this moral economy include: the obligation of intellectual patronage, according to which established intellectuals are expected to support and promote younger intellectuals who have attached themselves to their networks; the norm of intellectual loyalty, according to which disciples are expected to support and defend their masters against criticism from outside the network; and the norm of intellectual solidarity, according to which members of the same intellectual generation and institutional affiliation are expected to present a united front in debates with rival networks.

These norms are not without their positive dimensions. They create forms of intellectual community and mutual support that facilitate the intellectual work of individuals who might otherwise be unable to sustain it in the face of institutional hostility and material precarity. But

they also create powerful pressures toward conformity and loyalty that conflict with the demands of genuine intellectual independence.

All three figures in the tradition we are examining have, at various points in their careers, navigated the tension between the demands of intellectual loyalty and the demands of intellectual honesty. Sofa's public disagreement with Razzaq's positions, expressed in "Joddhopi Amar Guru" with both affection and critical distance, and his early criticism of Khan's first book, represent instances of this navigation: the attempt to maintain honest critical engagement without simply rejecting the norms of intellectual community that make sustained intellectual work possible.

8.3 Truth-Telling as Political Practice: A Philosophical Defense

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan collectively represents one of the most sustained and philosophically richest defenses of truth-telling as a political practice in the history of South Asian thought. This defense is worth articulating explicitly, because it connects the ethical commitments of the three figures to broader traditions of political philosophy.

The philosophical case for truth-telling as a political practice draws on several converging arguments. The first is the argument from democracy: genuine democratic governance requires access to reasonably accurate information about the conditions of the society being governed, and this access requires a community of knowers who are willing to report what they have learned even when doing so is politically inconvenient. A political system in which knowers systematically suppress or distort inconvenient information, whether out of political loyalty, material self-interest, or fear of consequences, cannot make rational collective decisions.

The second is the argument from long-term social welfare: societies that suppress inconvenient truths do not thereby escape the realities those truths describe. They merely delay and potentially worsen the consequences of those realities. The political problems that Bangladeshi intellectuals suppressed during the Hasina government's fifteen years of increasing authoritarianism did not disappear: they accumulated, deepened, and eventually erupted in the uprising of 2024 with consequences far more severe than honest acknowledgment and earlier address would have required.

The third is the argument from intellectual integrity: the intellectual who compromises their commitment to truth-telling for material advantage or political convenience does not merely fail an external ethical obligation. They damage themselves, their capacity for genuine understanding, and the quality of their intellectual contribution. Intellectual work is a practice that requires the cultivation of specific capacities, capacities for rigorous analysis, honest self-criticism, and genuine openness to evidence, and these capacities are damaged by their systematic suppression, just as physical capacities are damaged by disuse.

CHAPTER NINE: GENDER, CLASS, AND EXCLUDED VOICES

The Limits of the Tradition and the Work That Remains

9.1 The Gender Question

One of the most significant limitations of the intellectual tradition represented by Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, a limitation that their admirers must honestly acknowledge rather than defensively deny, is its relatively limited engagement with questions of gender justice and the intellectual contributions of women.

All three figures are men, and the intellectual world they inhabited was overwhelmingly male-dominated. The social networks through which intellectual life was organized, the coffee houses, the university common rooms, the all-night intellectual conversations that constituted the social medium of Dhaka's intellectual culture, were spaces in which women's participation was extremely limited, both by social norms and by the specific constraints that women faced in navigating those spaces.

This is not merely a sociological observation: it has philosophical consequences. A tradition of intellectual inquiry that excludes or marginalizes a significant portion of the human experience it claims to analyze is ipso facto an incomplete and therefore inadequate tradition. The experiences of Bengali Muslim women, their encounter with the triple subordination of colonial rule, class exploitation, and patriarchal authority, their intellectual and cultural contributions to Bengali Muslim life, and their specific forms of resistance and self-assertion, are inadequately represented in the canonical texts of the tradition we are examining.

The most obvious counter-evidence to this critique is the figure of Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain, the early twentieth-century Bengali Muslim feminist writer and educator whom Khan and others have written about and whose significance for the tradition they claim. But the honoring of a single historical female figure does not adequately address the structural absence of women's voices from the living intellectual tradition.

Khan has written on Roquia Sakhawat Hussain and others, suggesting some engagement with women's intellectual contributions. [Tritiyomatra](#) But the question is not merely whether individual women are acknowledged within the tradition but whether the tradition's analytical framework adequately captures the specific forms of subordination and resistance that women experience. A Lacanian-Marxist framework oriented toward the analysis of colonial and postcolonial political economy, while powerful for many analytical purposes, may not be adequate on its own for the analysis of patriarchal structures of domination that are, while not independent of colonial and class dynamics, also not simply reducible to them.

9.2 The Question of Caste

The question of caste is another dimension of Bangladeshi social life that receives insufficient attention in the tradition we are examining. While all three figures are attentive to class as a structural dimension of social inequality, the specific dynamics of caste, which in Bangladesh's context involves both the persistence of Hindu caste structures among the Hindu minority and

the analogous but differently structured hierarchies within Muslim Bengali society, are underexplored.

Sofa's analysis of Bengali Muslim identity touches on the caste dimension in important ways: his account of the conversion of low-caste Hindu communities to Islam recognizes that those conversions did not simply erase the social hierarchies they were partly motivated to escape, and that elements of caste hierarchy continued to structure Muslim social life in transformed forms. But this analysis is not fully developed into a systematic analysis of how caste dynamics interact with class dynamics and colonial hierarchies to produce the specific social structure of Bangladesh.

9.3 The Non-Muslim Voice

The intellectual tradition represented by Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is a tradition of Bengali Muslim intellectual thought, developed primarily by Bengali Muslim thinkers addressing questions that arise primarily from the specific historical and social situation of Bengali Muslims. This is not a limitation in any simple sense: every intellectual tradition is developed from a particular social position and addresses questions that arise from that position.

But Bangladesh is not a country of Bengali Muslims only. Its Hindu minority, roughly eight to ten percent of the population, its indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and elsewhere, and its Christian minority are all citizens of Bangladesh whose experiences and perspectives on the questions the tradition addresses are not adequately represented within it. The Chittagong Hill Tracts conflict, which involved the violent suppression of indigenous peoples' rights by successive Bangladeshi governments, is a dimension of Bangladeshi political history and contemporary reality that the tradition has not adequately engaged with.

This limitation is acknowledged not to diminish the tradition's extraordinary contributions but to identify the work that remains to be done: the extension and development of the tradition's analytical framework to encompass the full diversity of Bangladeshi experience, including the experiences of those whose voices have been most systematically excluded.

CHAPTER TEN: THE TRADITION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

New Media, New Audiences, and the Transformation of Intellectual Life

10.1 The Impact of Digital Communication

The intellectual tradition represented by Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan developed and took its mature form in conditions very different from those of the digital age: the conditions of a print culture in which ideas circulated slowly, through books and journals with limited circulation and significant barriers to publication, and of a public intellectual culture in which influence was exercised primarily through face-to-face conversations in specific social settings.

The digital revolution has transformed these conditions in ways that create both new opportunities and new challenges for the kind of intellectual work this tradition represents. The most obvious opportunity is the dramatic expansion of the potential audience: Salimullah Khan's lectures and interviews, posted on YouTube and shared through social media, reach audiences of hundreds of thousands rather than the hundreds who might have attended a physical lecture. The ideas of the tradition are no longer confined to the university seminar and the literary journal: they circulate freely in the digital public sphere, where they can reach anyone with an internet connection and an interest in Bangladeshi intellectual life.

Khan is a regular guest in talk shows on national and international political issues in Bangladesh, suggesting that his intellectual influence is exercised significantly through broadcast media as well as through print and academic channels. [Wikipedia](#)

But the digital transformation also creates new challenges. The intellectual discipline required to engage seriously with complex philosophical and political analysis is not well served by the formats in which digital media typically operate. The compression required for social media posts, the engagement-maximizing algorithms that reward emotional intensity over analytical rigor, and the speed of digital news cycles that demand immediate responses to rapidly changing situations all create pressures toward the kind of simplification, polarization, and intellectual opportunism that Sofa identified as the characteristic failure of Bangladeshi intellectual culture.

The question of how the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan can be preserved and developed in conditions shaped by digital communication is one of the most important challenges facing contemporary Bangladeshi intellectual life. It requires finding ways to maintain the analytical rigor, the intellectual honesty, and the long-form discursive engagement that genuine philosophical work requires, while also developing the new forms and new modes of communication that can reach the audiences that the digital age makes possible.

10.2 The Young Generation and the Tradition's Future

Khan's exploration of Bangladesh's politics and culture has a significant following among the country's young generation of writers and thinkers. [Wikipedia](#)

The young generation of Bangladeshi intellectuals who came of political age during and after the July 2024 uprising represents both the most immediate inheritance of the tradition and the most important challenge to it. These young people are in many ways the living proof that the tradition's intellectual investment has not been wasted: their political consciousness, their analytical frameworks, their sense of what Bangladesh should be and what it has failed to become, bears the marks of the intellectual work of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, however indirectly and however partially.

But they are also a generation shaped by conditions that the three figures did not fully anticipate: the conditions of neoliberal globalization, of digital communication, of global youth movements that draw on transnational intellectual resources very different from those that shaped the tradition, and of climate change as an existential threat that imposes its own specific demands on political and intellectual life. The July 2024 uprising reflected deep-rooted frustrations over

inequality, governance, and generational exclusion, and the movement for democratic accountability, equity, and systemic change expressed aspirations that while continuous with the tradition's concerns are also shaped by specifically contemporary conditions. [ScienceDirect](#)

The future of the tradition depends on whether this young generation can engage critically and creatively with the intellectual legacy of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan: taking what is genuinely illuminating while developing new analytical frameworks adequate to the new challenges they face. This is precisely the kind of engagement that all three figures modeled in their own relationships to the intellectual traditions they inherited: not passive reception of received wisdom but active, critical, and creative appropriation of intellectual resources in the service of genuine understanding.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS AND THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Tradition in Dialogue with Global Intellectual Currents

11.1 The Tradition and Postcolonial Theory: New Developments

The field of postcolonial theory has continued to develop in the period since the tradition we are examining took its mature form, and some of the most significant recent developments provide important context for evaluating and extending the tradition's contributions.

The growing literature on what scholars call "decolonizing the curriculum" or "epistemic decolonization" resonates directly with Khan's arguments about the need to transform the epistemological framework of Bangladeshi higher education. This literature, developed primarily in South African and British academic contexts but increasingly global in its reach, argues that the dominance of Western epistemological frameworks in global higher education reproduces colonial hierarchies at the level of knowledge production and certification, and that genuine educational decolonization requires not merely adding non-Western content to existing curricula but fundamentally rethinking the epistemological frameworks through which knowledge is organized and evaluated.

Khan's arguments about Bengali-medium education, about the need to develop indigenous theoretical frameworks rather than simply importing Western ones, and about the epistemological implications of language choice in academic contexts, are continuous with this global debate and indeed in some respects anticipate its major themes. The reciprocal recognition of these connections provides both validation for Khan's arguments and new theoretical resources for extending them.

The development of what scholars have called "southern theory," the systematic development of social scientific frameworks grounded in the specific experiences and intellectual traditions of the global South rather than derived from Northern frameworks and applied globally, is another relevant development. Raewyn Connell's work on "Southern Theory" (2007) and subsequent

contributions to this literature provide theoretical elaborations of the kind of intellectual position that the Razzaq-Sofa-Khan tradition has occupied in practice: the insistence that adequate social analysis must begin from the specific conditions of the society being analyzed rather than from theoretical frameworks developed for very different conditions.

11.2 The Tradition and New Developments in Islamic Philosophy

The early twenty-first century has witnessed an extraordinary flowering of new scholarship on Islamic philosophy and its relationship to modernity, democracy, and human rights. This scholarship, developed by thinkers including Abdullahi Ahmed an-Naim, Khaled Abou El Fadl, Tariq Ramadan, and many others, addresses many of the same questions that Sofa and Khan have engaged with: the relationship between Islamic religious identity and democratic political norms, the conditions under which Islam can support rather than undermine human rights, and the possibilities for developing authentically Islamic frameworks for addressing contemporary political challenges.

This global Islamic philosophical debate provides an important comparative context for understanding the specific contributions of the Bangladeshi tradition. The Bengali Muslim intellectual tradition that Sofa analyzed and Khan has extended is one instantiation of a broader global attempt to develop Islamic frameworks for engaging with modernity that are neither simple adoption of Western liberal norms nor defensive retreat into Islamic traditionalism.

What distinguishes the Bangladeshi contribution to this global debate is its specific historical grounding in the Bengali Muslim experience: the syncretic Islam of the Bengal delta, with its incorporation of pre-Islamic cultural elements, its Sufi philosophical tradition, and its long experience of coexistence with Hindu and Buddhist traditions, is a distinctive resource for developing Islamic approaches to pluralism and tolerance that are grounded in actual lived experience rather than in purely theoretical elaboration.

11.3 Psychoanalysis and Political Theory: The Lacanian Revival

The Lacanian tradition of political and cultural analysis, which Khan has been one of the most important practitioners of in the South Asian context, has continued to develop and diversify in the years since Khan first began deploying it in his analysis of Bangladeshi society. The work of Slavoj Žižek, Yannis Stavrakakis, and others in the European and North American context, and of various scholars in Asian and African contexts who have brought Lacanian frameworks to bear on postcolonial conditions, provides important comparative and theoretical resources for evaluating and extending Khan's contributions.

The most important theoretical development in this tradition is the increasingly sophisticated analysis of the relationship between fantasy, ideology, and political identification. The Lacanian concept of the "fundamental fantasy," the unconscious fantasmatic framework through which subjects organize their relationship to social reality and to enjoyment, has been developed by Žižek and others into a powerful tool for analyzing how ideologies function not merely by providing false beliefs about social reality but by structuring subjects' relationship to their own

desires and identifications in ways that make those ideologies emotionally compelling and resistant to rational critique.

The application of this framework to the analysis of Bangladeshi political ideology provides significant analytical depth. The fantasy through which the Liberation War of 1971 has functioned in Bangladeshi political life, the fantasy of a founding revolutionary moment that defines the nation's essential identity and against which all subsequent political developments are measured, is a paradigm case of what the Lacanian tradition means by a fundamental political fantasy. Khan's consistent engagement with this fantasy, his insistence both on the genuine significance of 1971 and on the ways in which that significance has been ideologically manipulated, represents exactly the kind of critical analysis that the Lacanian framework is designed to facilitate.

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE UNFINISHED AGENDA

What the Tradition Demands of Its Inheritors

12.1 The Tasks That Remain

The intellectual tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has accomplished an extraordinary amount. It has provided the most sustained and sophisticated analysis of Bangladeshi society, politics, and culture produced by indigenous thinkers. It has maintained, against enormous social and institutional pressures, a commitment to intellectual independence and truth-telling that represents the highest realization of what intellectual life can and should be. And it has provided the intellectual resources necessary for a new generation to understand both the structural conditions of their situation and the possibilities for transforming it.

But the tradition has not completed its work, because the work it set out to do is not the kind of work that can be completed by any three individuals, however brilliant and however dedicated. The transformation of Bangladesh that the tradition's deepest commitments demand, the achievement of genuine equality, human dignity, and social justice as the organizing principles of national life, the completion of the decolonization project in all its dimensions, the development of a political culture capable of sustaining genuine democratic governance, and the construction of intellectual institutions adequate to the needs of a genuinely self-determining people, is the work of generations, not of individuals.

The tradition's inheritors in the younger generation of Bangladeshi intellectuals face a demanding agenda. They must extend the tradition's analytical framework to address the specific challenges of their moment: the digital transformation of public discourse, the climate crisis and its specific implications for one of the world's most climate-vulnerable societies, the complex dynamics of global economic integration and its distributional consequences, and the new configurations of religious and secular identity that are emerging in the post-Hasina political landscape.

The Bangladesh Future Forum 2026 brought together academics, activists, and policymakers to think about Bangladesh's post-revolutionary future, with Salimullah Khan among the prominent voices. The forum examined questions of political settlements, institutional reform, and the reconfiguration of state-citizen relationships in the aftermath of the July 2024 uprising. [Bangladeshfutureforum](https://www.bangladeshfutureforum.org/)

This kind of institutionalized intellectual forum, bringing together diverse voices to think systematically about fundamental questions of political development, is precisely the kind of intellectual institution that the tradition has consistently argued is necessary for genuine democratic governance. Its existence and its inclusion of voices like Khan's suggests that the tradition is not merely producing individual works of philosophical analysis but contributing to the construction of the intellectual institutions that Bangladesh needs.

12.2 The Philosophical Demands of the Present

The political upheaval of 2024 has created a moment of genuine philosophical openness in Bangladesh, a moment in which the fundamental questions of political organization, cultural identity, and social justice are genuinely open to debate in ways they have not been for many years. This moment creates both an opportunity and a responsibility for the intellectual tradition we have been examining.

The opportunity is to bring the tradition's analytical resources to bear on the urgent practical questions of political reconstruction in ways that are both intellectually rigorous and practically accessible. This requires translating the sophisticated theoretical frameworks of the tradition into forms that can reach and engage the broader public, not merely the small circle of theoretically sophisticated readers, and doing so without sacrificing the analytical depth that makes the tradition valuable.

The responsibility is to maintain the intellectual integrity that the tradition demands even in conditions where political alignment is tempting and where the desire to serve the cause of positive change can lead to intellectual compromise. The greatest danger for any intellectual tradition in a moment of political possibility is the temptation to become a partisan of a particular political project rather than a critical analyst of the full range of political forces and dynamics. The commitment to truth-telling that all three figures embodied requires that this temptation be resisted, even when the political project in question is one that the intellectual genuinely supports.

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has, in the end, one final and most fundamental lesson to teach. It is a lesson that is simultaneously simple to state and extremely difficult to practice: that genuine intellectual work, honest inquiry pursued with rigor and courage regardless of its consequences, is not merely an academic exercise. It is one of the most important forms of political action available to those whose primary medium is thought and language. In a society where the quality of public knowledge shapes the quality of collective decision-making, the intellectual who thinks honestly and speaks truthfully is performing a service to democracy that no other role can adequately substitute.

SUMMARY OF PART TWO

Part Two has conducted a sustained analytical examination of the philosophical systems of all three figures, analyzing their epistemological commitments, their political philosophies, their ethical frameworks, and their theories of cultural and intellectual life. We have read these systems against the most recent political developments in Bangladesh, including the July 2024 uprising and its aftermath, and against the most recent developments in the global intellectual traditions with which the Bangladeshi tradition is in dialogue. We have also examined the major controversies that the tradition has generated: the Farhad Mazhar debate, the Bangla Academy controversy, the India question, and the ongoing debates about how the tradition should be extended to address dimensions of Bangladeshi social life, including gender, caste, and minority experience, that it has not yet adequately engaged with.

The overall picture that emerges is of a philosophical tradition of extraordinary richness and continuing vitality: a tradition that has made irreplaceable contributions to the understanding of Bangladesh and that continues to provide the most important intellectual resources available for thinking through the challenges of the present. It is a tradition with genuine limitations, whose honest acknowledgment is itself a form of respect for the tradition's own highest values. And it is a tradition whose work is emphatically unfinished, whose continuation and development by the new generation of Bangladeshi thinkers and intellectuals is one of the most important intellectual tasks of the present moment.

End of Part Two

Part Three will examine the specific political theories of each figure in systematic detail, tracing their applications to specific episodes in Bangladeshi political history and evaluating their predictive and explanatory power against the evidence of subsequent events. Part Four will develop the jurisprudential analysis, examining how the philosophical commitments of the tradition translate into specific positions on constitutional design, legal reform, and the organization of the justice system. Parts Five through Ten will address cultural analysis, Islamic thought, comparative dimensions, ethics, controversies, and the tradition's future respectively.

PART THREE

POLITICAL THEORIES, HISTORICAL APPLICATIONS, AND THE LONG ARGUMENT ABOUT WHAT BANGLADESH IS

Preface to Part Three

Part One established the biographical, historical, and contextual foundations from which the intellectual tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan emerges. Part Two conducted the sustained analytical examination of their philosophical systems, their epistemological commitments, their ethical frameworks, and the major controversies that have attended their work. Part Three now turns to the most demanding task of the entire textbook: the systematic reconstruction and critical assessment of the specifically political theories that these three figures developed, tracing those theories through their applications to concrete episodes in Bangladeshi political history, and evaluating their explanatory and predictive power against the evidence of subsequent events.

This is a demanding task for reasons that go beyond the obvious complexities of political analysis. The first reason is methodological. Political theory, when it is serious, is not merely normative prescription or abstract model-building. It is, at its best, a form of structural analysis that illuminates the deep mechanisms by which power operates, the structural conditions that constrain and enable political actors, and the dynamics through which political systems reproduce themselves or undergo transformation. To evaluate political theory against historical evidence, one must first reconstruct the theory with sufficient precision to know what exactly it claims, and then interpret the historical evidence with sufficient rigor to know whether those claims are confirmed, disconfirmed, or merely underdetermined. Both operations are themselves theoretically loaded, and the interaction between them creates interpretive challenges that have no simple resolution.

The second reason is that none of our three figures produced political theory in the form of a systematic treatise. Abdur Razzaq produced nothing of the sort whatsoever, leaving his political analysis distributed across lectures, conversations, and the reconstructed accounts of those who learned from him. Ahmed Sofa produced political analysis primarily through literary and essayistic forms that resist the kind of systematic codification that academic political theory normally requires. Salimullah Khan has been the most systematic, but even his systematic works are interventionist rather than comprehensively architectonic: they address specific questions and controversies rather than laying out a complete political theoretical framework in the manner of, say, John Rawls or Jurgen Habermas.

This means that the work of reconstruction is itself a significant intellectual operation, not merely a summary of pre-existing material. In reconstructing the political theories implicit in the work and practice of each figure, this textbook is performing a kind of theoretical excavation, making explicit what was often left implicit, systematizing what was often left fragmentary, and connecting what was often left disconnected. This operation must be conducted with both rigor and humility, rigor in the sense of not attributing to these figures positions they did not hold or implications they would not accept, and humility in the sense of acknowledging that reconstruction always involves interpretation, and interpretation always involves the interpretive perspective of the one who interprets.

With these methodological cautions in place, let us proceed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: ABDUR RAZZAQ'S POLITICAL THEORY

The Architecture of a Hidden System

13.1 The Problem of Speaking Without Writing

There is a well-established tradition in the history of philosophy, running from Socrates through Wittgenstein and beyond, of thinkers whose most important work was done in conversation rather than in writing. Abdur Razzaq belongs squarely in this tradition, but with a specifically Bangladeshi inflection that makes his case uniquely interesting and uniquely difficult to analyze.

Socrates did not write because he believed that writing falsified the living character of philosophical inquiry, reducing the dynamic interplay of question and answer to a frozen monologue. Wittgenstein's later work was reconstructed from lecture notes and conversations because his thinking had outgrown the architectonic ambitions of the *Tractatus* and found its proper medium in the more exploratory forms of philosophical investigation. Razzaq's case is different from both in ways that matter for understanding his political theory.

Razzaq did not abstain from writing because of a principled opposition to the written form of philosophical inquiry. He wrote extensively in the form of research reports, administrative documents, and private correspondence. There is evidence that he began several extended written projects that were never completed. The explanation for his non-publication is more complex, and more revealing of his intellectual personality. It involves a combination of extremely high intellectual standards, a deep discomfort with the performative dimensions of academic authorship, a preference for the genuinely dialogic over the monologic, and possibly also a strategic political calculation about the costs of putting one's views definitively on the record in conditions of political surveillance and authoritarian governance.

The combination of these factors produced what one might call a politics of intellectual reservation. Razzaq reserved his most penetrating political analysis for the private classroom, the informal conversation, the intimate gathering. He cultivated a kind of strategic ambiguity in public settings, saying enough to provoke thought without saying so much as to provide a fixed target for either political repression or academic criticism. This strategic ambiguity was not dishonesty or cowardice. It was a deliberate epistemological and political stance: the stance of a thinker who understood that in conditions of political instability and authoritarian surveillance, the unwritten thought is more powerful and more free than the written argument.

Understanding this stance is essential for understanding Razzaq's political theory. His political thought was not a system in the sense of a set of propositions that could be extracted from their context and evaluated independently. It was a practice of political understanding, a set of habits of analysis, a repertoire of questions and frameworks that he deployed in specific conversational contexts to help his interlocutors see what they were not otherwise able to see. The political theory implicit in this practice can be reconstructed, but only if we attend carefully to the specific contexts in which it was deployed, the specific questions it was designed to answer, and the specific intellectual traditions from which it drew its resources.

The primary source for reconstructing Razzaq's political theory is the work of his students and interlocutors, above all Ahmed Sofa and Salimullah Khan, but also the political figures who were

shaped by his teaching, including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Tofail Ahmed, and others who have spoken or written about what they learned from him. Secondary sources include the biographical and memorial literature that accumulated around Razzaq after his death in 1999, as well as the accounts of foreign scholars, including Ronald van den Berg of Leiden University who conducted extensive interviews with Razzaq in the 1980s, whose recorded conversations provide perhaps the most direct access we have to his voice and his thinking on political questions.

13.2 Razzaq's Theory of the State: Power, Legitimacy, and the Colonial Inheritance

The foundation of Razzaq's political theory is his analysis of the state in the South Asian context. Unlike European political theorists who could begin their analysis from a context in which the modern state was an established, if contested, institution with centuries of development behind it, Razzaq worked in a context where the modern state was itself a colonial artifact whose relationship to the societies over which it presided was deeply problematic in ways that European political theory was not equipped to diagnose.

The colonial state in British India, which is the immediate predecessor of both the Pakistani state and the Bangladeshi state, was not designed to represent the interests of the populations it governed. It was designed to extract economic value from those populations for the benefit of the colonial metropole, to maintain order sufficient for that extraction, and to prevent the development of the kind of organized political resistance that might threaten it. The institutions of colonial governance, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the police, the military, the educational system, were all designed with these purposes in mind. They were designed, in other words, not to serve the governed but to manage them.

Razzaq understood this fundamental character of the colonial state with an analytical clarity that was in his time relatively rare among South Asian political scientists, most of whom were more comfortable analyzing the formal institutional structures of colonial and postcolonial governance than interrogating its underlying logic of power. His training under Harold Laski had given him a framework for thinking about the state as a site of conflicting class interests and power relationships rather than as a neutral arbiter of competing social claims, and this Laskian pluralism was in turn inflected by his reading of Weber, Gramsci, and the great sociologists of political power.

What Razzaq saw, with unusual sharpness, was that the transition from colonial rule to postcolonial independence did not automatically transform the fundamental character of the state. The administrative machinery, the legal frameworks, the military hierarchy, the educational system, and above all the habits of mind and relationship to power that these institutions had produced over generations, these did not change simply because the men at the top of the structure changed their nationality. The postcolonial state in South Asia inherited not merely the physical infrastructure of colonial governance but its deep structural logic: the assumption that the function of the state is to manage populations rather than to represent their interests, the practice of treating political authority as a resource to be appropriated and deployed for personal and group benefit, and the culture of impunity for those who held state power.

This analysis has profound political implications. It means that the achievement of formal independence in 1947, or in 1971 for Bangladesh, did not by itself constitute the kind of fundamental political transformation that the liberation movements promised. The state that was inherited was structurally biased against the democratic aspirations that those movements articulated. To realize those aspirations would require not merely changing the personnel of state power but transforming the character of the state itself: its relationship to citizens, its modes of accountability, its distribution of authority, and its underlying logic of governance.

This is a diagnosis that carries enormous implications for how one evaluates the political history of Bangladesh since independence, and Razzaq applied it consistently and unflinchingly, even when the implications were uncomfortable for political figures he personally respected and supported. The BAKSAL system established by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, which abolished multi-party politics and concentrated power in a single-party structure, was for Razzaq not primarily a personal betrayal by a man he had helped to educate and who had genuinely believed in the democratic aspirations of the liberation movement. It was, more fundamentally, the expression of the structural logic of the inherited colonial state operating through a new set of actors. Once any political movement acquires state power in the context of such a structurally biased state apparatus, the tendency toward authoritarianism is not merely personal psychology. It is structural pressure. The apparatus pulls toward concentration and away from accountability, and only the most systematic institutional resistance can counteract that pull.

Razzaq's analysis was in this respect more structurally pessimistic than the political culture of Bangladesh at the time could readily absorb. The dominant narrative of liberation politics was a narrative of personal and national heroism, of a great leader and a great people achieving freedom against oppression. This narrative had the immense political advantage of providing emotional resources for national solidarity and political mobilization. But it had the analytical disadvantage of obscuring the structural conditions that would determine whether the aspirations animating the liberation movement could actually be realized. Razzaq saw the structural conditions clearly, and what he saw led him to an early and well-founded pessimism about the trajectory of the new state.

13.3 The Class Analysis of Bengali Muslim Society

Razzaq's political theory was not reducible to institutional analysis. It was grounded in a detailed and sophisticated analysis of the class structure of Bengali Muslim society, an analysis that owed something to Marxist sociology but was inflected by his specific understanding of the historical formations that had produced class relationships in Bengal.

The key insight in this class analysis was what one might call the thesis of structural subordination at multiple levels. Bengali Muslim society had been subordinated to British colonial power. Within that colonial system, it had been further subordinated to the Bengali Hindu professional and mercantile classes who were better positioned to take advantage of the educational and commercial opportunities that colonial rule provided. And within Bengali Muslim society itself, there were hierarchies of class, education, and access to power that reproduced at a smaller scale the broader dynamics of domination and subordination that operated at the regional and imperial levels.

The class that Razzaq paid particular attention to was what one might call, in the terminology of postcolonial sociology, the comprador intelligentsia: the educated class that mediated between colonial power and the broader population, serving as the translators, administrators, professionals, and cultural brokers through whom colonial governance operated. This class occupied a structurally contradictory position. It owed its education, its professional opportunities, and its social prestige to the colonial system. At the same time, it was itself subordinated within that system, occupying positions of service rather than positions of genuine power, and experiencing the daily indignities of racial and cultural hierarchy.

This structural contradiction produced, in Razzaq's analysis, a distinctive political psychology: simultaneously deferential toward power and resentful of it, simultaneously aspiring to the cultural norms of the dominant class and committed to the political liberation of the subordinated class, and therefore deeply prone to a characteristic political oscillation between conformism and radicalism, between integration and revolt. This is the same psychological structure that Frantz Fanon analyzed in *The Wretched of the Earth*, though Razzaq arrived at his version of the analysis independently and from a different intellectual tradition.

The political implications of this class analysis were that the educated Bengali Muslim class was not, by virtue of its education or its nationalist commitments, automatically positioned to be the genuine representative of the broader population's interests. Its structural position made it prone to what Razzaq (in recorded conversations with his students) called using power for self-replication: the tendency to use political access not to transform structural inequalities but to reproduce its own privileged position under new political conditions. The language of liberation, democracy, and social transformation could and would be deployed by this class as political legitimization while the actual exercise of power served narrower interests.

This analysis is not cynical in the simple sense of attributing bad faith to the individuals involved. Razzaq was careful to distinguish between structural analysis and moral judgment. Individual members of the educated political class could be genuinely committed to the values they articulated. The structural pressures operating on them could nonetheless produce outcomes that contradicted those values, not necessarily because of personal corruption but because the institutional framework within which they operated systematically rewarded certain behaviors and punished others in ways that pulled against the realization of their stated commitments.

This structural analysis of the political class provides the framework for understanding Razzaq's consistently skeptical attitude toward specific political figures and movements, an attitude that was not born of political cynicism but of analytical realism. He respected Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and had invested genuinely in his political education. He nonetheless predicted, on structural grounds, that the concentration of political power in the hands of the Awami League and its leader would produce authoritarian distortions. He was right. His structural analysis predicted this outcome not because he had any special insight into Mujib's personal character but because the structural conditions made it likely, regardless of the character of the specific individuals involved.

13.4 Razzaq's Theory of Political Parties: Representation Without Democracy

One of the most distinctive and analytically powerful elements of Razzaq's political theory is his analysis of political parties in the South Asian postcolonial context. This analysis draws on Laski's pluralist theory of group politics, on Weber's sociology of political parties, and on Michels' iron law of oligarchy, but adapts and extends these frameworks in ways specific to the Bangladeshi context.

The central problem in Razzaq's analysis of political parties is the gap between representational claim and actual practice. Political parties in Bangladesh uniformly claim to represent the interests of the masses: the workers, the peasants, the poor, the disenfranchised. This representational rhetoric is the primary legitimating resource available to political parties in a context where formal democratic elections require mass support. But the actual organizational structure of these parties, their internal power relationships, their modes of recruitment and promotion, and their relationship to economic resources, systematically contradict their representational claims.

Razzaq identified several specific mechanisms through which this contradiction operated. The first is what he called the dynastic tendency: the pattern by which political leadership in Bangladesh tended to become hereditary, concentrated in specific families, and transmitted through personal loyalty networks rather than through genuine democratic competition within the party. This tendency, visible in both the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party from their early histories, was not an accidental feature of specific leadership personalities. It was a structural consequence of the relationship between political power and economic resources in a context where the state was the primary site of resource allocation and where personal loyalty networks were more reliable guarantors of loyalty than institutional accountability mechanisms.

The second mechanism is what he called the client trap: the pattern by which political mobilization of lower-class constituencies was achieved through patron-client relationships rather than through the articulation and organization of those constituencies' genuine structural interests. The poor supported political parties not primarily because those parties represented a program of structural change that would genuinely improve their conditions, but because individual political figures provided immediate personal benefits, including employment, protection, access to state services, and resolution of personal conflicts, in exchange for political loyalty. This relationship effectively converted potential political subjects into political objects, dependent on the personal benevolence of political patrons rather than empowered as agents of structural change.

The third mechanism is the intellectual vacuum problem: the tendency of the major political parties to treat intellectual activity as a service function rather than as a genuine input into political direction. Intellectuals associated with political parties were expected to provide legitimation, not analysis. The kind of critical analysis that Razzaq and his students practiced was valued as long as it directed its critical energies outward, toward the party's political opponents, but became unwelcome when it turned its analytical gaze on the party's own practices and their structural implications. This created a systematic selection process within party-affiliated intellectual circles in favor of partisan apologists and against genuine critical analysts.

These three mechanisms, the dynastic tendency, the client trap, and the intellectual vacuum problem, combined to produce political parties that were structurally ill-equipped to represent the genuine interests of the constituencies they nominally championed, regardless of the good intentions of their founders and leaders. The organizational logic of party politics in Bangladesh operated against genuine democratic representation in ways that could not be overcome simply by electing better leaders or writing better party platforms.

This analysis led Razzaq to a position on political parties that was neither simply anti-party nor pro-party in any conventional sense. He did not argue that political parties should be abolished or that some other form of political organization could simply replace them. He recognized that in the conditions of Bangladesh, political parties were the primary vehicle for mass political mobilization and that any account of democratic politics had to engage with them as they actually existed rather than as they ideally should be. But he refused to extend them the kind of automatic legitimacy that their representational claims demanded, and he consistently insisted that genuinely democratic politics required the development of forms of accountability and institutional constraint that could counteract the structural tendencies toward oligarchy and patronage politics.

13.5 The Concept of Elite Capture: Razzaq's Most Powerful Political Insight

If Razzaq's most distinctive contribution to South Asian political science had to be identified in a single concept, it would be what one might call his theory of elite capture, though this is a retrospective formulation using terminology that has become standard in development economics and political science but was not available to Razzaq in those terms. The concept as Razzaq deployed it referred to the process by which the formal institutions of democratic governance, including electoral systems, legislative bodies, constitutional frameworks, and legal institutions, were systematically colonized by elite interests in ways that converted them from mechanisms of popular accountability into mechanisms of elite self-reproduction.

Elite capture in Razzaq's analysis was not primarily a matter of corruption in the narrow sense, though corruption was one of its expressions. It was a structural process by which the rules, norms, and practices of democratic institutions were gradually reshaped to serve the interests of the political and economic elite while maintaining the formal appearance of democratic functionality. Elections were held, but the conditions under which they were conducted, including the financing of political campaigns, the control of administrative machinery, the capacity for political violence, and the manipulation of electoral boundaries and rules, systematically favored incumbents and established families. Laws were made, but the legal system's ability to apply those laws equally regardless of the defendant's political connections was systematically compromised. Constitutional rights were enumerated, but the institutions responsible for protecting those rights were staffed by individuals whose loyalty ran primarily to the political forces that had appointed them.

Razzaq traced this process of elite capture with analytical precision through the specific institutional histories of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi states. He was particularly interested in the mechanisms by which the bureaucratic apparatus, which he analyzed as the primary carrier of colonial state logic in the postcolonial period, maintained its institutional continuity and its

structural autonomy relative to democratic political control. The top of the bureaucratic hierarchy in Bangladesh, trained in the traditions of the colonial civil service and deeply committed to its own institutional reproduction, exercised a degree of structural power over the conditions of governance that no elected government had been able fundamentally to challenge. Political leaders came and went; the bureaucratic structure adapted, absorbed, and ultimately reconditioned each successive government.

This analysis of bureaucratic power was one of the elements of Razzaq's political theory that most directly influenced Salimullah Khan's subsequent work. Khan's analysis of what he calls the permanent state, the combination of military, bureaucratic, and intelligence apparatus that persists through changes in elected government and constitutes the real locus of power in Bangladesh, is a direct development and extension of Razzaq's insights about the relationship between formal democratic institutions and the actual exercise of state power.

13.6 Application to the Pakistan Period: The Making of a Diagnostic Tradition

Razzaq's political theory was developed and tested in the crucible of the Pakistan period, the years between 1947 and 1971 during which East Pakistan was constitutionally part of the Pakistani state while being systematically subordinated to West Pakistani political and economic domination. His analysis of this period constitutes both the original application of his theoretical framework and, retrospectively, one of the most impressive demonstrations of its analytical power.

The central political fact of the Pakistan period, from Razzaq's analytical perspective, was the convergence of two distinct but mutually reinforcing processes of elite capture. The first was the capture of Pakistani state institutions by a specifically West Pakistani, Punjabi-dominated military-bureaucratic complex. The second was the capture of East Pakistani political institutions by a Bengali Muslim educated class that, whatever its nationalist commitments in relation to West Pakistan, reproduced its own versions of dynastic politics, patron-client mobilization, and intellectual servility in relation to the East Pakistani population.

The Language Movement of 1952 was, in Razzaq's reading, an episode that revealed both the potential and the limitations of Bengali political consciousness. Its potential lay in the capacity it demonstrated for mass political mobilization in defense of genuine cultural interests, a mobilization that crossed class lines and organized a broad coalition around a specific, articulable demand. Its limitations lay in the subsequent process by which the movement's political energy was captured by the existing political parties and leadership structures rather than generating genuinely new forms of political organization.

Razzaq was among the first to note that the Language Movement's aftermath demonstrated a characteristic pattern of political dynamics in Bangladesh: mass mobilization creates political possibilities; established elites and political organizations capture those possibilities; the structural transformation that the mobilization demanded is partially achieved, sufficiently to demobilize the movement, while the deeper structural changes that would genuinely address the conditions that generated the mobilization are indefinitely deferred. This pattern, which he analyzed in detail in the context of the Language Movement, would recur in the Liberation War

of 1971, in the mass movement that overthrew Ershad in 1990, and in the 2024 student uprising: each episode of genuine popular mobilization creating possibilities for structural transformation and then seeing those possibilities substantially, though not entirely, foreclosed by the subsequent dynamics of elite capture.

The other crucial episode of the Pakistan period that Razzaq analyzed in revealing detail was the political crisis of 1954, in which the United Front led by A.K. Fazlul Huq won a landslide election victory against the Muslim League in East Pakistan. This election was one of the most decisive democratic verdicts in the history of South Asia: the Bengali Muslim population rejected the Muslim League, the party of Pakistan's founding, with overwhelming clarity. But the United Front government was dismissed by the central government within two months of its formation, and the political lesson that the episode taught, that democratic elections in East Pakistan could be overridden by the exercise of central government power whenever their results were inconvenient to the ruling establishment, shaped the subsequent politics of Bengali nationalism in ways that Razzaq analyzed with great precision.

His analysis was that the 1954 episode crystallized the fundamental constitutional contradiction of Pakistan: a state in which the democratic principle of popular sovereignty was formally endorsed but in which the actual exercise of sovereign power was controlled by an elite that was willing to override democratic results when necessary. This constitutional contradiction could not be resolved within the framework of a united Pakistan because the interests it was designed to protect, specifically the power of the West Pakistani establishment, were incompatible with the democratic aspirations of the Bengali majority. The only genuine resolution of the contradiction was the creation of a separate Bengali state: not as a first-best solution to the political problems of the subcontinent, but as the only available exit from a constitutional arrangement that had structurally precluded the realization of Bengali democratic aspirations.

13.7 Application to Independent Bangladesh: The Theory Meets Its Most Difficult Test

The severest test of Razzaq's political theory came not in the Pakistan period, when the analysis of external domination and subordination provided a relatively clear diagnostic framework, but in the period of independent Bangladesh, when the question was no longer about colonial or quasi-colonial subjugation but about whether genuine democratic self-governance was achievable by the Bengali Muslim political class in conditions of formal independence.

Razzaq's answer to this question was characteristically complex: he neither endorsed the optimistic view that independence had solved the structural problems of Bengali political life, nor adopted the pessimistic view that those problems were insurmountable. His analysis was that independence had transformed the problem without solving it. The independence movement had generated political aspirations and political energies that the post-independence political system was structurally ill-equipped to satisfy. The gap between aspiration and institutional reality would generate political turbulence, and the management of that turbulence would tend toward either authoritarian stabilization or democratic experimentation, with the structural pressures toward the former and the political culture of liberation toward the latter.

The first years of independence confirmed the pessimistic side of this analysis with painful clarity. The Awami League government's rapid slide from liberation movement to authoritarian consolidation, culminating in the BAKSAL system of 1975, was not surprising to Razzaq. He had predicted it, not in the sense of a specific forecast, but in the sense that his structural analysis of the dynamics of postcolonial political power in Bangladesh pointed toward exactly this kind of outcome. The very success of the liberation movement, in mobilizing mass support and concentrating political energy in a single party and leader, had created conditions in which the structural tendencies toward centralization and the suppression of opposition could operate without effective institutional resistance.

The August 1975 coup, which killed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his family and brought a series of military governments to power over the following decade and a half, was for Razzaq both a political catastrophe and, in a terrible way, an analytical confirmation. The catastrophe was the destruction of the lives of people he had known and cared about, and the interruption of whatever possibilities for democratic development had survived the BAKSAL period. The analytical confirmation was the demonstration that the colonial state apparatus, now controlled by the military rather than by an elected civilian government, was pursuing its structural logic of self-reproduction with the same remorseless efficiency that it had always displayed.

What Razzaq found most analytically revealing about the post-1975 period was not the fact of military rule per se, but the ease and speed with which the military governments of Ziaur Rahman and then Hossain Muhammad Ershad were able to construct civilian political support systems. General Zia's creation of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, an entirely new political organization constructed essentially from above by a military ruler, demonstrated with startling clarity that political parties in Bangladesh could be manufactured through state patronage and personal loyalty networks rather than emerging organically from genuine social movements or political programs. This confirmed Razzaq's analysis of the shallow social roots of the major political parties: they were not the organized expressions of genuine class interests or coherent political programs, but patronage networks held together by personal loyalty to specific leaders and the promise of access to state resources.

13.8 Razzaq and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: A Triangulation of Pedagogy, Friendship, and Political Disappointment

The relationship between Abdur Razzaq and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is one of the most historically significant teacher-student relationships in the political history of Bangladesh, and its trajectory from intellectual formation through political collaboration to quiet disappointment illuminates both the content of Razzaq's political theory and the limits of what political education can achieve in the face of structural pressures.

Razzaq taught Mujibur Rahman at the University of Dhaka in the late 1940s, and by all accounts the relationship between them was one of genuine mutual respect and affection. Razzaq saw in Mujib a political intelligence of unusual quality: a man who understood people, who could mobilize popular energy, who had the personal courage and the political instinct to navigate the dangerous waters of Pakistani politics. Mujib, in turn, regarded Razzaq as one of his most

important intellectual mentors, a source of the analytical understanding of political structures and historical dynamics that his extraordinary natural political talent needed to translate into effective strategic thinking.

The political education that Razzaq provided Mujib was, by all accounts, focused primarily on political economy, the sociology of class and power in South Asia, and the structural analysis of the Pakistani state. There is strong evidence, in the Six-Point Program that Mujib announced in 1966 as the charter of Bengali autonomy demands, of Razzaq's analytical influence: the program's specific economic demands, particularly its proposals for separate foreign exchange accounts for East and West Pakistan and for a separate militia, reflected a sophisticated understanding of the structural economic asymmetries that had been central to Razzaq's analysis of Pakistani political economy.

But there were also areas in which Razzaq's influence was less visible in Mujib's political practice: specifically, in the areas of democratic institution-building, constitutional design, and the relationship between political leadership and political parties. Razzaq's structural analysis of the tendencies toward dynastic politics and patron-client mobilization in the Bangladeshi context was not effectively translated into the organizational design of the Awami League or the constitutional framework of independent Bangladesh. The tendency toward personalism, the concentration of political authority in the figure of the leader, and the subordination of institutional accountability to personal loyalty, were present in the Awami League from its early years and were not counteracted by the kinds of institutional mechanisms that Razzaq's analysis suggested were necessary.

It would be unfair and analytically inaccurate to attribute this gap between Razzaq's structural analysis and Mujib's political practice entirely to personal failure on Mujib's part. The structural pressures toward exactly these tendencies were enormous, and the political conditions of both the Pakistani period and the immediate post-independence period placed specific and intense demands on the Awami League and its leader that made institutional experimentation difficult and personalist concentration of authority politically rational in the short term. The tragedy of the relationship between Razzaq and Mujib is less a story of individual failure than of the gap between the analytical understanding of structural problems and the political capacity to counteract those problems in real historical conditions.

After the BAKSAL proclamation and then the 1975 coup, Razzaq's public silence on these events was characteristic and significant. He did not publish condemnations. He did not give public lectures interpreting what had happened. He continued to teach and to think, but his political commentary, whatever form it took, was confined to private conversations and to the analytical framework that he continued to develop with his students. This silence was not the silence of political cowardice or of complicit approval. It was the silence of a man who understood that in the specific conditions of post-coup Bangladesh, public speech carried risks that were not worth taking for the kinds of marginal political effects it would produce, and that the more durable and important work was the long-term intellectual project of helping a new generation understand the structural conditions of their situation.

13.9 The Question of BAKSAL and Its Meaning in Razzaq's Framework

The BAKSAL system introduced by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in January 1975 deserves extended analysis in the context of Razzaq's political theory because it crystallizes, with extraordinary clarity, the central tension in postcolonial democratic politics between the structural logic of state power and the democratic aspirations that liberation movements articulate.

BAKSAL (Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League) was introduced through the Fourth Amendment to the Bangladesh Constitution, which replaced the parliamentary system with a presidential system concentrating power in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's hands, abolished all political parties except the newly formed BAKSAL, nationalized all newspapers, and fundamentally altered the constitutional framework of Bangladesh. Supporters of the change argued that it was necessitated by the extreme social and economic difficulties of post-liberation Bangladesh, particularly the 1974 famine and its aftermath, and that a strong centralized state was necessary to overcome the chaos and exploitation that the multi-party parliamentary system had failed to address.

In Razzaq's analytical framework, this argument, while not entirely without merit in its empirical references to Bangladesh's genuine difficulties, was structurally mistaken in its proposed solution. The centralization of power in a single party and leader did not address the structural problems that had prevented the parliamentary system from functioning effectively. It simply reproduced those structural problems in a new institutional form, now without the partial accountability mechanisms that the parliamentary system, however imperfect, had provided.

More specifically, Razzaq's framework predicted that any system concentrating power in a single leader without effective institutional accountability would eventually turn that concentration of power against the very constituencies whose interests the leader claimed to represent. The mechanisms of control that BAKSAL required, including the management of a single-party state, the subordination of all organized political activity to the ruling party's direction, and the suppression of independent media, created both the incentives and the means for the suppression of popular political activity and the entrenchment of a narrow elite. The structural logic was toward oligarchy, whatever the individual intentions of the leader.

The speed with which the BAKSAL system generated its own internal contradictions and contributed to the political crisis that ended in the August 1975 coup confirmed this structural analysis. The system alienated significant sections of the political class, including some of the most committed supporters of the liberation movement, without generating the kind of mass popular support that could have provided it with a genuine democratic foundation. The combination of alienated elites and disappointed popular constituencies created the political conditions in which the military coup of August 1975 could succeed with minimal organized resistance.

Razzaq drew from this episode a conclusion that has continued to be relevant to subsequent Bangladeshi political development: that the accumulation of political power without the corresponding development of institutional accountability is not a solution to the problems of democratic governance in Bangladesh but an acceleration of those problems. The greater the concentration of power, the greater the eventual disruption when that concentration proves

unsustainable. And the disruption always falls most heavily on those who are least able to protect themselves from it.

13.10 The Prediction of Military Intervention and Its Long Aftermath

Perhaps the most striking predictive achievement of Razzaq's political theory was his analysis of the role of the military in Bangladeshi political life. In the context of the early 1970s, when the liberation war had just concluded and the Bangladesh military was a newly constituted force whose political role was still being defined, Razzaq's prediction that military intervention in civilian politics was not merely possible but structurally probable ran against the dominant narrative of liberation politics, which tended to see the military as a force for national defense rather than political intervention.

The basis of Razzaq's prediction was his analysis of the structural conditions that made military intervention politically rational from the perspective of the military leadership. These conditions included the weakness of civilian political institutions, particularly their inability to manage the distributional conflicts and economic difficulties of the post-liberation period without generating severe political instability. They included the military's inherited organizational superiority, derived from its colonial and Pakistani antecedents, which gave it a capacity for coordinated action that civilian political institutions lacked. They included the specific character of the Bangladeshi officer class, recruited primarily from the educated middle class, with its own political aspirations and its own sense of the national interest. And they included the regional geopolitical context, in which neighboring countries with their own interests in Bangladeshi politics could provide both incentive and support for military political engagement.

The 1975 coup confirmed the prediction, as did the subsequent decade and a half of military or quasi-military governance. But what makes Razzaq's analysis most remarkable is not the specific prediction of military intervention, which was not unique to him, but the structural analysis of why military governments in Bangladesh tended to generate civilian political parties as instruments of legitimation, and why this process of militarization-through-civilianization was itself a distinctive form of the structural problems he had identified in Bangladeshi political life.

Generals Ziaur Rahman and Hossain Muhammad Ershad both followed the same pattern: having seized power through military intervention, they moved to legitimate their rule through the construction of civilian political organizations and the holding of elections under conditions they controlled. This pattern confirmed Razzaq's thesis about the centrality of legitimate political claim-making in Bangladeshi politics: even military rulers found it necessary to operate within the discursive framework of democratic legitimacy, because the alternative, naked rule by force without any democratic pretense, was politically unsustainable in a society whose political culture had been fundamentally shaped by the democratic aspirations of the liberation movement.

The political legacy of the military period, specifically the Bangladesh Nationalist Party created by Ziaur Rahman and the Jatiyo Party created by Ershad, continued to shape Bangladeshi politics long after the formal return to civilian rule in 1991. Razzaq's structural analysis illuminates why: parties created from above by military rulers, funded by state patronage and held together by

personal loyalty rather than programmatic commitment, were not transformed into genuine mass democratic organizations simply by the change in their leadership's civilian rather than military status. They retained the structural characteristics of their origins even as they acquired the formal attributes of democratic political parties.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: AHMED SOFA'S POLITICAL THEORY

The Dialectics of Liberation and Betrayal

14.1 The 1972 Manifesto and Its Intellectual Origins

Ahmed Sofa's most important contribution to Bangladeshi political theory is his 1972 work on the character of the Bangladeshi intellectual class, a work whose formal title is less important than its central argument: that the liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistani rule had created an opportunity for genuine intellectual and cultural renewal that was being squandered by the same habits of servility, opportunism, and self-deception that had characterized the Bengali Muslim intellectual class under colonialism and under Pakistani rule.

This argument was not, as it has sometimes been characterized, simply a polemical attack on specific individuals or on the cultural-political establishment of the newly independent Bangladesh. It was a structural analysis, informed by Sofa's reading of European critical theory (particularly the Frankfurt School), of the relationship between intellectual production and political power in postcolonial conditions. The structural conditions that Sofa analyzed were specific to the Bangladeshi context but instantiated a general dynamic visible across postcolonial intellectual culture: the tendency of the educated class to use the language of liberation while serving the interests of the new ruling elites who had inherited the colonial state apparatus.

Sofa's intellectual formation drew on several traditions that his teacher Abdur Razzaq had introduced him to, but synthesized them in a distinctive way that reflected both his literary sensibility and his particular historical location. From Razzaq he had received the structural analysis of the postcolonial state and the class dynamics of Bengali Muslim society. From his own extensive reading in European literature and philosophy, he brought a sense of the relationship between intellectual honesty and political courage that was informed by the traditions of European critical humanism, particularly as represented by writers like Voltaire, Camus, and Sartre. And from his own experience of the liberation war period, specifically his time in Calcutta among the refugee intellectuals and freedom fighters, he brought a visceral sense of the gap between the revolutionary aspirations that the liberation movement articulated and the political realities that were already beginning to emerge even before independence was achieved.

The combination of these influences produced a mode of political theory that was not systematic in the academic sense but was analytically penetrating, morally serious, and politically courageous in ways that made it uniquely influential among the generation of Bangladeshi intellectuals who came of age in the 1970s and 1980s. Sofa did not offer a complete theory of the

state or a systematic critique of capitalism. He offered something that was in some ways more valuable and more rare: a sustained and unflinching analysis of the specific mechanisms by which intellectual life in Bangladesh had failed to fulfill its proper function, combined with a vision of what that function properly was and what it would require to fulfill it.

14.2 The Theory of the Mochrap Intellectual: Corruption, Servility, and the Betrayal of Thought

The central conceptual contribution of Sofa's political theory is his analysis of what one might translate as the servile intellectual, a category that in his Bengali usage had stronger moral connotations than the English rendering easily conveys. For Sofa, the servile intellectual was not merely someone who compromised their independence for reasons of personal convenience or political calculation, though servile intellectuals certainly did that. The servility he analyzed was a more profound condition: a disposition of the entire intellectual personality toward the reproduction of dominant power relations, operating through mechanisms that were often invisible to the intellectuals involved.

The mechanisms Sofa identified were several and deeply interrelated. The first was what he called the language of learning without the substance of learning: the tendency to deploy the vocabulary and citation practices of intellectual seriousness without the actual practice of sustained and honest inquiry. Bangladeshi intellectuals, in Sofa's analysis, had developed a sophisticated capacity for performing intellectual activity, for producing texts that had the formal attributes of scholarly work, that could be presented in the appropriate institutional settings and received the appropriate institutional recognitions, without those texts actually embodying the kind of rigorous and honest thinking that genuine intellectual work requires. This performance of thinking without the reality of thinking served the interests of the dominant political and social order by providing it with the appearance of intellectual legitimation while leaving its actual premises and practices immune from genuine critical scrutiny.

The second mechanism was the corruption of intellectual authority through political clientelism. In the conditions of Bangladesh, where intellectual institutions were economically dependent on state patronage and where the most prestigious positions in the academy, the media, and the cultural establishment were allocated through political connections rather than intellectual merit, the relationship between intellectual activity and political authority tended systematically toward subordination. Intellectuals who were willing to provide political legitimation for the ruling party received institutional support, public recognition, and access to the platforms and audiences that gave their work social significance. Intellectuals who refused to provide such legitimation were marginalized, institutionally starved of resources, and denied access to the main channels of public communication.

Sofa analyzed this system of intellectual clientelism with a precision that reflected his own experience of operating outside it, or at least in a deeply ambiguous relationship to it. He was himself a figure of public significance whose work reached large audiences, which meant that he could not be simply dismissed. But he was also deeply uncomfortable in institutional settings, resistant to the forms of compromise that sustained participation in the cultural and political establishment required, and therefore always in a somewhat precarious institutional position.

The third mechanism, perhaps the most subtle and most analytically interesting, was what Sofa called the patriotic displacement: the tendency to substitute nationalist sentiment for genuine critical thought, to treat the act of affirming Bangladeshi national identity as itself an intellectual contribution rather than as a political gesture that required substantiation through actual analytical work. This mechanism was particularly powerful in the immediate post-liberation period, when the emotional intensity of the liberation struggle and the genuine achievement of national independence created conditions in which nationalist sentiment was politically dominant and criticism of the national political project could be characterized as unpatriotic or even treasonous.

Sofa's analysis of this mechanism is one of the most important contributions to the intellectual history of Bangladeshi nationalism, and it has lost none of its relevance in the decades since it was first articulated. The capacity of nationalist sentiment to function as a thought-stopper, to transform political and cultural analysis into a simple binary of loyalty and betrayal, has been a consistent feature of Bangladeshi political culture across all the political periods that have followed liberation. Each successive ruling party has deployed this binary in its own version, identifying itself with the authentic nation and characterizing its critics as enemies of the national interest.

14.3 Cultural Politics as Political Theory: The Novel as Political Instrument

Sofa's contribution to political theory was not confined to his essays and polemics. Some of his most important political thinking was expressed through his fiction, particularly his major novel *Ogrochatonir Ghora* (The Horse of Madness, sometimes translated as *The Indomitable Horse*), which many critics regard as the most significant Bengali novel of the twentieth century and which is simultaneously a work of extraordinary literary achievement and a sustained exercise in political theory through narrative form.

The political theory embedded in the novel operates through multiple registers simultaneously. At the level of narrative, it is the story of an individual's attempt to maintain intellectual and moral integrity in conditions that systematically punish it: a figure who represents the ideal of genuine intellectual independence confronted with a social environment that rewards every form of compromise and punishes every form of resistance. At the level of social analysis, it is a portrait of the specific class formation that Sofa's essays analyzed more directly: the educated Bengali Muslim professional class in its various positions relative to the colonial, Pakistani, and post-independence power structures. And at the philosophical level, it is an exploration of the relationship between individual freedom and social determination, between the aspiration to genuine selfhood and the social pressures that seek to convert that aspiration into its simulacrum.

The political theory expressed through this narrative form has an intimacy and specificity that the essay form cannot easily achieve. The novel allows Sofa to show, not merely to argue, how the mechanisms of intellectual servility operate in actual lives: how they work through personal relationships, professional ambitions, romantic entanglements, family loyalties, and the micro-politics of everyday social interaction. The political structures that his essays analyzed in terms of class and institutional power appear in the novel as they actually function in people's lives, as

pressures on the texture of personal experience that shape choices and dispositions from the inside rather than merely constraining them from the outside.

This is a crucial insight for any genuinely adequate theory of political ideology: that ideological reproduction operates not primarily through explicit belief systems but through the shaping of desires, habits, and dispositions that feel personal even though they are structurally produced. Sofa reached this insight through his literary practice before it was available to him in theoretical form, and it anticipates in some ways the later work of theorists like Louis Althusser on ideological state apparatuses and of Bourdieu on habitus, though its grounding in specific Bengali cultural history gives it a specificity and richness that the more abstract versions of the theory do not always achieve.

14.4 The Critique of Liberation War Mythology: Sofa's Most Controversial Contribution

Among the many controversial positions that Sofa took in his intellectual career, none has generated more sustained debate and more fierce opposition than his critical analysis of the political uses of Liberation War mythology in post-independence Bangladesh. This analysis, developed across multiple essays, interviews, and his late fiction, constitutes one of the most important and most unsettling contributions to Bangladeshi political theory, and it is one that has become, if anything, more rather than less relevant to the intellectual and political situation of Bangladesh in 2024-2026.

Sofa's critique was not directed at the Liberation War itself, which he regarded as a genuine and necessary historical achievement and in whose achievement he had participated. It was directed at the process by which the memory of the Liberation War was politicized, idealized, and ultimately distorted into a mythology that served the interests of specific political forces rather than the actual historical understanding of what had happened in 1971.

The mechanism of this mythologization was a form of what one might call selective sacralization: the conversion of certain aspects of the liberation struggle into sacred symbols that could not be subjected to critical analysis, while certain other aspects, including the political divisions within the liberation movement, the violence committed by liberation fighters as well as by the Pakistani military, the class interests that shaped the post-liberation political settlement, and the gap between the revolutionary aspirations of the mass movement and the actual character of the new state, were systematically suppressed.

The selective sacralization served specific political purposes. The Awami League and its supporters had the most obvious interest in maintaining a mythology that identified the party exclusively with the liberation achievement and characterized any criticism of the party as a betrayal of liberation values. But Sofa argued that the dynamic went beyond the specific interests of the Awami League, deep into the structure of Bangladeshi political culture. The Liberation War mythology had become a kind of national civil religion, a system of shared sacred symbols and narratives that constituted the primary form of collective national identity, and that therefore commanded loyalty across political lines in ways that made critical interrogation politically dangerous for anyone who participated in public political culture.

The danger of this civil religion, in Sofa's analysis, was not merely intellectual but deeply political. A national political culture that organized itself around a mythology rather than a realistic understanding of its own history was systematically disabled from learning the political lessons that its own history contained. If the Liberation War was a sacred achievement that could not be subjected to critical analysis, then the political failures that followed independence could not be analyzed in terms of the continuities between the liberation movement and the post-liberation state. The structural problems that had generated authoritarianism, military intervention, and the corruption of democratic institutions would remain invisible because their genealogy in the liberation movement itself could not be honestly examined.

This analysis was deeply controversial because it seemed to many to undermine the legitimacy of the national founding narrative. Critics accused Sofa of serving the interests of those who had opposed the liberation movement, of providing intellectual cover for the forces that sought to rehabilitate Pakistani collaboration, and of betraying the memory of the liberation war martyrs. These accusations were not entirely without foundation in the sense that Sofa's critique could be and was deployed in politically problematic ways by forces that did not share his underlying commitment to honest historical analysis. But the misuse of an analysis by people with whom the analyst disagrees does not automatically invalidate the analysis, and Sofa consistently refused to abandon his critique simply because it was politically misused.

14.5 Sofa's Theory of Bengali Muslim Cultural Consciousness: The Problem of Identity

Sofa's most systematic intellectual achievement, and the work through which he engaged most directly with the deepest questions of Bangladeshi national identity, was his long essay on the Bengali cultural consciousness of Muslim Bengal, a work that, while formally an exercise in cultural history, is simultaneously one of the most sophisticated contributions to the political theory of Bengali Muslim identity.

The central question of this work is what kind of cultural and political identity was available to Bengali Muslims, given their specific historical formation: a population that was culturally Bengali in its language, literary traditions, and many of its everyday cultural practices, while being religiously Muslim in a way that connected it to a vast global Islamic civilization with its own rich intellectual and cultural traditions. The relationship between these two dimensions of identity, the Bengali and the Islamic, had never been fully harmonized. There were traditions within Bengali Muslim culture, particularly the Sufism that had been central to the Islamization of Bengal, that had achieved a rich and creative synthesis of Bengali and Islamic cultural elements. But there were also traditions of more exclusivist Islamic identity that emphasized the distinction between Muslim and Bengali cultural formations and that tended to regard the Bengali cultural heritage with suspicion insofar as it reflected pre-Islamic religious influences.

Sofa's analysis of this tension is both historically sophisticated and politically consequential. Historically, he showed how the specific pattern of Islam's spread in Bengal, through Sufi missionaries who adopted local languages and cultural forms rather than through conquest, had produced a specifically Bengali Muslim culture that was neither simply Islamic in the sense of the Arab or Persian Islamic world nor simply Bengali in the sense of the Hindu Bengali tradition,

but a distinctive third formation with its own character and its own specific intellectual and cultural resources.

The political consequence of this analysis was that Bengali Muslim identity, properly understood, did not require a choice between Bengali cultural heritage and Islamic religious identity. The history of Bengali Muslim culture demonstrated that these two dimensions could be and had been integrated creatively and productively. The political movements that had forced a choice, including the Pakistan movement's insistence that Islamic identity was incompatible with Bengali cultural nationalism and the liberation movement's counterclaim that Bengali cultural identity was incompatible with an Islamically defined political project, were both, in Sofa's analysis, imposing false dichotomies on a cultural reality that was more complex and more interesting than either could accommodate.

This analysis had direct implications for how Sofa understood the political challenges facing Bangladesh in the post-liberation period. If Bengali Muslim identity was genuinely complex, containing within itself resources for both cultural self-expression and democratic political organization, then the political project of Bangladesh did not require the suppression of Islamic identity in the name of secular Bengali nationalism, nor the suppression of Bengali cultural heritage in the name of Islamist political ideology. It required, instead, the development of a political culture adequate to the actual complexity of Bengali Muslim identity: one that could honor both dimensions without subordinating either to the other.

This argument was politically ahead of its time in the 1970s and 1980s, when Bangladeshi political culture was polarized between a Mujibist secular nationalism that was deeply suspicious of Islamic cultural and political expression and an Islamist politics that sought to redefine Bangladesh as an Islamic state in ways that suppressed Bengali cultural specificity. Sofa's insistence on the genuine complexity of Bengali Muslim identity, and on the political possibilities that complexity contained, was not widely received in either camp. But its long-term influence on how younger Bangladeshi intellectuals, including Salimullah Khan, have understood the relationship between Bengali and Islamic identity in Bangladeshi politics has been profound.

14.6 Application to the Mujib Years: The Prophet Without Honor

Sofa's political analysis of the Mujib years, the period between Bangladesh's independence in December 1971 and the August 1975 coup, combined the structural analysis he had inherited from Razzaq with a prophetic intensity that was distinctively his own. He saw the failures of the Mujib period not primarily as failures of individual character or policy choice but as the expression of the structural problems in Bengali political culture that his own theoretical work had identified.

The specific failure that most concerned Sofa in this period was what he called the failure of cultural reconstruction. The liberation movement had promised not merely political independence from Pakistan but a genuine renewal of Bengali cultural life: the development of a cultural and intellectual tradition adequate to the aspirations of a free Bengali people. In Sofa's assessment, this cultural renewal had simply not occurred. The cultural life of independent

Bangladesh was dominated by the same servile intellectual patterns that had characterized the colonial and Pakistani periods, now dressed in the new clothing of liberation nationalism but otherwise structurally continuous with what had preceded it.

The mechanisms of this continuity were, in Sofa's analysis, the same mechanisms he had identified in his 1972 work: the clientelism of cultural and intellectual institutions, the displacement of genuine critical thought by nationalist sentiment, and the structural pressure on intellectuals to serve power rather than challenge it. The difference was that in independent Bangladesh, the power that intellectuals were now serving was formally their own national power, which made the dynamic less visible and therefore more insidious.

14.7 Sofa's Theory of the Counter-Revolution: Cultural Politics and Political Reaction

One of the most analytically significant aspects of Sofa's political thought is his analysis of what he called the cultural counter-revolution: the process by which the gains of the liberation movement were progressively reversed not only at the level of formal politics but at the deeper level of cultural norms, values, and assumptions about what Bangladesh was and should be.

This process accelerated after the 1975 coup, as the military governments of Zia and Ershad deliberately cultivated political Islam as both a source of legitimacy and a counterweight to the Awami League's claim to represent the authentic heritage of the liberation movement. The rehabilitation of Islamist political parties that had collaborated with the Pakistani military in 1971, the amendment of the constitution to remove its secular provisions and later to introduce Islam as the state religion, and the general shift in official cultural emphasis away from Bengali cultural nationalism and toward Islamic identity, were for Sofa aspects of a systematic political project whose purpose was to undermine the political and cultural foundations on which genuine democratic development in Bangladesh might be built.

But Sofa's analysis of this counter-revolution was not simply a defense of Mujibist secular nationalism against Islamist reaction. It was more complex and more penetrating. He argued that both the Mujibist secular nationalism and the Islamist reaction were responses to the same underlying failure: the failure to develop a political culture adequate to the genuine complexity of Bengali Muslim identity. Mujibist nationalism had tried to resolve this complexity by privileging the Bengali dimension and marginalizing the Islamic, in ways that alienated a significant portion of the Bengali Muslim population whose Islamic identity was not merely instrumental or reactionary but genuinely important to their self-understanding. The Islamist reaction exploited this alienation, but offered only the mirror image of the Mujibist error: privileging the Islamic dimension and marginalizing the Bengali, in ways that denied the specific cultural heritage through which Bengali Muslims had constructed their own distinctive form of Islamic life.

The genuine political alternative, in Sofa's analysis, was neither available nor easily articulable in the political conditions of the late 1970s and 1980s. It required the development of a political culture that could hold the complexity of Bengali Muslim identity without reducing it to a simple choice between Bengali and Islamic dimensions, and that could build democratic institutions adequate to managing the pluralism that this complexity generated. This was a project for the

long term, requiring cultural and intellectual work that political leaders were neither equipped for nor inclined to undertake.

14.8 The Novel as Prophetic Text: Re-reading Sofa in 2025

The re-reading of Sofa's major novel *Ogrochatonir Ghora* from the perspective of 2025 reveals the prophetic dimension of his political theory with particular clarity. The novel, written in the 1970s, anticipates with remarkable accuracy the specific dynamics of intellectual culture that have characterized Bangladesh across the half-century since its publication.

What the novel shows, through its narrative of an intellectual struggling to maintain integrity in a culture that systematically rewards its abandonment, is the mechanism of self-selection that determines who succeeds in Bangladeshi intellectual and cultural life. Those who are willing to perform the rituals of political loyalty, to provide the cultural legitimation that ruling parties require, to suppress their own analytical judgments when those judgments conflict with the dominant political narrative, are rewarded with institutional positions, publication opportunities, and social prestige. Those who refuse these compromises are not simply excluded; they are subjected to a process of social marginalization that operates through subtle rather than crude mechanisms, through the gradual withdrawal of institutional support, the subtle social signals that mark them as unreliable or difficult, and the systematic cultivation of their replacements from among those more willing to play by the rules.

This is not the specific dynamic of any single period of Bangladeshi political history. It is the general structural dynamic of the cultural field in Bangladesh as Sofa analyzed it, and it has manifested with remarkable consistency across all the successive political periods that have followed the novel's composition. The faces of the ruling party change; the specific ideological content of the required political loyalty shifts; the language of justification evolves from liberation nationalism to Islamist ideology to development technocracy and back again. But the structural dynamic remains: intellectual and cultural life in Bangladesh tends to be organized around the reproduction of political loyalty rather than the production of genuine critical thought.

The fact that Salimullah Khan, who has been among the most sustained critics of this dynamic, has himself been simultaneously celebrated and marginalized in ways that precisely fit the pattern the novel describes, is perhaps the most direct confirmation of Sofa's prophetic accuracy.

14.9 Sofa and the Question of Religious Politics: A Complex Legacy

Sofa's political analysis of religion in Bangladeshi public life is one of the most complex and contested aspects of his intellectual legacy. He was neither a secularist in the European liberal sense nor an Islamic traditionalist. His position was distinctive and has been frequently misunderstood by partisans of both secular and religious political positions.

Sofa was deeply respectful of Islam as a religious tradition and genuinely engaged with Islamic thought in its philosophical and literary dimensions. His analysis of Sufism in Bengali Muslim cultural history was not merely anthropological but reflected a genuine appreciation of the specific spiritual and intellectual contributions that Sufi Islam had made to Bengali cultural life.

At the same time, he was deeply critical of the political uses of Islam in Bangladeshi politics, not on the grounds that Islam had no legitimate place in public life, but on the grounds that the forms in which Islamic identity was being deployed politically were systematically distorting and impoverishing both the political and the religious dimensions of Bengali Muslim life.

The political deployment of Islam that Sofa criticized was what one might call instrumentalized Islam: religion used as a political resource for mobilizing loyalties and delegitimizing opponents rather than as a genuine framework for ethical and political thought. This instrumentalization was visible in both the secularist and the Islamist camps: the secularists instrumentalized the liberation narrative to mobilize support for the Awami League while the Islamists instrumentalized Islamic identity to mobilize support for their own political projects. In neither case was the underlying religious or cultural tradition being engaged with on its own terms.

This analysis led Sofa to positions that were simultaneously radical and conservative: radical in their critique of the political instrumentalization of culture and religion, and conservative in their insistence on the intrinsic value of cultural and religious traditions that deserved to be engaged with seriously rather than deployed instrumentally. The combination was difficult to sustain in a political culture organized around simple choices between competing instrumentalizations, which helps explain both the isolation that Sofa experienced for much of his career and the posthumous recognition that has made him one of the most celebrated figures in recent Bangladeshi intellectual history.

14.10 The Legacy of Political Prophecy: Sofa's Influence on the Post-2024 Generation

Sofa died in 2001, more than two decades before the mass uprising that brought down the Hasina government in August 2024. But his analytical framework, transmitted through Salimullah Khan and through the broad influence of his essays and novel on the generation of intellectuals who came of age in the 1990s and 2000s, provided crucial analytical resources for understanding what that uprising represented and what its aftermath demanded.

The young people who led the July 2024 uprising were, many of them, readers of Sofa: his essays on the servility of Bangladeshi intellectual culture, his critique of the gap between the rhetoric of liberation and its political reality, and his insistence on the necessity of genuine critical thought as a precondition for democratic political life were among the intellectual influences that shaped their political consciousness. The fact that the uprising was directed against a government that claimed to represent the authentic heritage of the liberation movement, and that its central demand was for accountability and institutional reform rather than for any specific partisan political alternative, reflected something of the Sofaist critique of liberation mythology and its political uses.

The post-2024 political landscape in Bangladesh, with its complex mixture of democratic aspiration, political uncertainty, institutional weakness, and the competing claims of multiple political forces, presents exactly the kind of challenge that Sofa's political theory was designed to help navigate. The question of how to maintain genuine critical independence in conditions of political possibility and pressure, of how to honor the aspirations of a genuinely popular movement without becoming its partisan apologist, of how to engage with the complexity of

Bangladeshi cultural and political identity without reducing it to simple binary choices, these are questions that Sofa's work addresses with a precision and urgency that makes it essential reading for anyone trying to understand what is happening in Bangladesh today.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: SALIMULLAH KHAN'S POLITICAL THEORY

The Lacanian-Marxist Framework and Its Applications

15.1 From Razzaq's Critique to Khan's Synthesis: A New Theoretical Architecture

Salimullah Khan's first significant publication, produced when he was still a student at the University of Dhaka, was a critical response to Abdur Razzaq's famous lecture on the state of the Bangladeshi nation. This biographical detail is philosophically significant. Khan did not enter the intellectual tradition of his predecessors by simple affiliation and discipleship. He entered by critical engagement, by reading the work of his intellectual fathers carefully enough to identify where it needed to be extended, supplemented, or corrected.

The critical argument Khan made in that early work, and which has continued to organize his intellectual project in the four decades since, was not that Razzaq's analysis was wrong but that it was incomplete in a specific way: it described the structural conditions of Bangladeshi political life with great accuracy but lacked the theoretical framework necessary to explain how those structural conditions reproduced themselves at the level of individual consciousness, desire, and identification. The question was not merely institutional but psychological, not merely about the structures of power but about the mechanisms by which those structures were internalized and reproduced by the very subjects they oppressed.

To address this gap, Khan brought to the inherited framework of Razzaq and Sofa a set of theoretical resources that neither of his predecessors had fully developed: Lacanian psychoanalysis, Althusserian ideology theory, and the emerging framework of postcolonial theory as developed by Fanon, Said, and their successors. These resources provided the theoretical vocabulary for analyzing the psychological and cultural mechanisms through which structural conditions are reproduced at the level of individual and collective identity formation.

The synthesis that Khan developed from these diverse materials is not a systematic theory in the sense of a fully articulated set of propositions about how Bangladeshi society operates. It is, rather, a theoretical practice: a set of analytical moves, interpretive frameworks, and critical questions that he deploys in specific analyses of specific aspects of Bangladeshi political and cultural life. The coherence of this practice derives not from a single overarching theory but from the consistent deployment of a distinctive set of theoretical commitments across a wide range of analytical contexts.

The most fundamental of these commitments is the rejection of what one might call the transparency thesis: the assumption that political actors know what they are doing and why they are doing it, and that the task of political analysis is simply to describe and evaluate their actions.

Against this assumption, Khan insists, following Lacan and Freud, that political actors are motivated by unconscious desires and fantasies that they do not directly access, and that the explicit justifications and programs that political actors articulate are always, at least in part, rationalizations of these unconscious motivations rather than transparent expressions of them. This means that adequate political analysis must go beneath the surface of explicit political discourse to the level of fantasy, desire, and identification that structures that discourse from below.

15.2 The Concept of Behat Biplab: The Diverted Revolution and Its Theoretical Implications

Khan's most important theoretical concept, and the one that most directly builds on the framework inherited from Razzaq and Sofa while extending it in new theoretical directions, is the concept of the diverted revolution, which he developed in his book *Behat Biplab* (1971). The concept refers to the process by which the genuine revolutionary aspirations of the liberation struggle were diverted from their structural implications by the specific way in which independence was achieved and the specific character of the political settlement that followed it.

The argument proceeds as follows. The liberation struggle of 1971 was not merely a movement for national independence in the narrow political sense. It expressed, in Khan's reading, a profound popular aspiration for equality, human dignity, and social justice, an aspiration that went well beyond the simple desire to be governed by Bengalis rather than by Pakistanis. The mass mobilization of the liberation period drew on a genuine and deep popular political consciousness that was simultaneously nationalist, democratic, and socially transformative in its aspirations.

The specific process by which independence was achieved, however, had the effect of diverting this revolutionary energy from its structural implications. Independence was achieved primarily through military means, with crucial Indian military support, rather than through the kind of sustained popular political organization that would have built the institutional foundations for a genuinely democratic postcolonial state. The military achievement of independence created conditions in which the immediate political tasks were those of establishing state authority, managing the humanitarian crisis, and rebuilding a shattered economy, rather than the political tasks of institution-building and power redistribution that a genuine social revolution would have demanded. The political class that took power in independent Bangladesh was the class that had led the liberation movement, specifically the Awami League and its allied organizations, and this class was committed to specific political and economic interests that were not necessarily aligned with the structural transformation that the popular aspirations of the liberation movement demanded.

The result was what Khan calls the diverted revolution: a political outcome in which the immediate political goals of the liberation movement were achieved but its deeper structural aspirations were deflected, deferred, and ultimately incorporated into a new political order that reproduced the fundamental structural inequalities of the colonial and Pakistani periods in a new nationalist guise. This is not a unique pattern in the history of revolutionary movements, Khan acknowledges. The literature on revolution from Marx to Trotsky to Fanon is full of analyses of

the gap between revolutionary aspiration and political outcome. What is specific to the Bangladeshi case is the particular mechanisms through which this gap was produced and the specific forms of ideological legitimation through which it has been sustained.

The concept of the diverted revolution provides the organizing framework for Khan's analysis of the entire subsequent political history of Bangladesh: each successive political dispensation, from the Awami League governments of the 1970s through the military regimes of the 1980s through the period of competitive two-party politics from 1991 through the Hasina years from 2009 to 2024, represents a different configuration of the same fundamental dynamic: the ongoing tension between the popular aspirations expressed in the liberation movement and the structural conditions that prevent their realization.

15.3 The Three Principles and Their Philosophical Architecture

In his analysis of the Liberation War, Khan identified three fundamental principles that in his interpretation expressed its deepest normative content: equality, human dignity, and social justice. These three principles are not merely rhetorical formulations. They constitute, in Khan's analysis, a philosophical program of considerable depth and specificity that provides the normative foundation for a genuinely transformative political project.

The principle of equality in Khan's framework is not merely formal equality before the law, though it includes that. It is a substantive equality that encompasses equality of political participation, equality of economic opportunity, and equality of cultural recognition. The formal equality promised by the constitutional framework of independent Bangladesh has been systematically subverted by the structural inequalities of class, region, gender, and cultural background that the political system has reproduced and in many cases intensified.

The principle of human dignity is closely related to the Kantian moral framework that Khan draws on in his philosophical ethics, but is inflected by the specifically postcolonial context in ways that the Kantian framework does not automatically provide for. In the postcolonial context, the violation of human dignity that most urgently demands redress is not merely the violation of individual rights but the structural denial of dignity to entire populations defined by their class, cultural identity, or relationship to the colonial past. The educational system's treatment of Bengali-medium students as structurally inferior to English-medium students, the political system's treatment of the rural poor as objects of patronage rather than subjects of democratic governance, and the cultural system's treatment of popular Bengali culture as less valuable than the imported cultural forms of global elite culture, are all violations of the principle of human dignity in this more substantive sense.

The principle of social justice provides the distributive framework that connects the abstract commitments to equality and dignity to the concrete economic and social conditions of Bangladeshi political life. In Khan's usage, social justice is not primarily a matter of welfare provision or redistributive taxation, though it includes these. It is a matter of the structural reorganization of the conditions under which economic value is produced and distributed, a reorganization that addresses not merely the symptoms of inequality but its structural causes.

These three principles taken together constitute what Khan regards as the unfulfilled promise of the Liberation War: the normative program that the liberation movement implicitly articulated and that the subsequent political history of Bangladesh has systematically failed to realize. The entire arc of Bangladeshi political development since 1971 can be read, in Khan's framework, as a series of attempts to reconcile the political system with these principles and a series of failures to achieve that reconciliation.

15.4 Khan's Theory of Postcolonial State Power: The Permanent State and Its Mechanisms

Khan's theory of the state in Bangladesh draws directly on Razzaq's structural analysis but extends it in significant ways through the incorporation of Gramscian concepts of hegemony and the Althusserian theory of ideological state apparatuses. The result is a more comprehensive account of how state power operates in Bangladesh that addresses not merely the coercive mechanisms of state power but the hegemonic and ideological mechanisms through which it reproduces itself.

The concept of the permanent state is central to this analysis. Khan argues, drawing on and extending Razzaq's insights about the bureaucratic apparatus, that beneath the shifting surface of elected governments, military rulers, and constitutional arrangements, there is a more permanent structure of state power consisting of the senior bureaucracy, the military leadership, the intelligence apparatus, and the networks of economic and political influence that connect these institutional actors to the broader political and economic elite. This permanent state exercises a degree of structural power over the conditions of governance that no elected government has been able to fundamentally challenge.

The permanent state reproduces itself not primarily through coercion, though coercion is available to it, but through hegemonic mechanisms: the control of the conditions under which political knowledge is produced and disseminated, the management of the boundaries of legitimate political discourse, and the cultivation of a political culture that takes the basic structural arrangements of the permanent state as given rather than as objects of political contestation.

The educational system is Khan's primary example of a hegemonic ideological state apparatus in Bangladesh. Through its organization of knowledge, its allocation of status and opportunity, its reproduction of linguistic hierarchies, and its cultivation of specific habits of political thought and identification, the educational system produces subjects who are predisposed to accept the basic structural arrangements of the existing political order as natural and legitimate rather than as historical products that could be otherwise.

This analysis of the educational system's political function provides the theoretical foundation for Khan's advocacy of Bengali-medium education, which in his framework is not merely a linguistic or cultural policy question but a political question about the reproduction of colonial hierarchies. The English-medium educational system does not merely teach in a different language. It produces subjects for whom the values, assumptions, and habitual reference points of the colonial and global elite culture are constitutive of their identity, and who are therefore structurally predisposed to reproduce the political arrangements that this culture supports.

15.5 The Fantasy Structure of Bangladeshi Political Identity

Khan's most distinctively Lacanian contribution to Bangladeshi political theory is his analysis of what he calls the fantasy structure of Bangladeshi political identity: the set of unconscious fantasmatic scenarios through which Bangladeshi political subjects organize their relationship to political reality, to political authority, and to the promises of political transformation.

The central political fantasy of Bangladeshi political life, in Khan's analysis, is what he calls the founding fantasy of the liberation: the fantasy of a moment of pure revolutionary liberation in which the entire population was united in a single political act of self-determination that expressed their genuine collective will. This fantasy, which draws on the very real historical event of the 1971 liberation but systematically idealizes and simplifies it, functions in Bangladeshi political culture as what Lacan calls a fundamental fantasy: a scenario that structures subjects' relationship to political reality by providing an imaginary image of what that reality essentially is and what it essentially promises.

The political function of this fundamental fantasy is complex and paradoxical. On the one hand, it provides a normative standard against which actual political practice can be measured, and found wanting. In this sense, it is a resource for political critique: by pointing to the gap between the idealized moment of liberation and the actual political reality of independent Bangladesh, it can motivate political opposition to the failures and corruptions of post-liberation governance.

On the other hand, the fantasy is also a mechanism of political disempowerment, because it structures political expectation in terms of a return to or realization of a founding moment that by definition cannot be replicated. The fantasy positions the liberation moment as the standard of genuine political authenticity, and all subsequent political moments as degraded copies or betrayals of that standard. This produces a political culture that is simultaneously nostalgically oriented toward an idealized past and permanently dissatisfied with the present, but that is not thereby oriented toward a realistic analysis of how to build genuinely democratic institutions in the specific conditions of the present.

The Awami League's political use of the liberation legacy exploits this fantasy structure systematically, positioning the party as the authentic inheritor of the liberation moment and its political opponents as enemies or betrayers of that moment. Khan's analysis of this political use of the liberation fantasy is one of his most important contributions, because it illuminates the specific mechanism by which a genuine historical achievement is converted into an instrument of political domination.

15.6 Application to the Hasina Period: The Longest Stretch of Diverted Revolution

The government of Sheikh Hasina Wajed, which governed Bangladesh from 2009 through August 2024, provides the most extended and in many ways the most revealing application of Khan's theoretical framework in recent Bangladeshi political history. Khan was both a sustained intellectual critic of the Hasina government and a complex figure in relation to it: at various points appearing as a fellow traveler of the broader Awami League political project in his support for the war crimes tribunal and his opposition to Islamist political forces, while

simultaneously offering some of the most penetrating structural criticisms of the government's authoritarian tendencies.

The trajectory of the Hasina government from 2009 to 2024 can be read, in Khan's framework, as an accelerating expression of the dynamics he had identified in his analysis of the diverted revolution. The government came to power in 2009 with a genuine democratic mandate and a program that included accountability for liberation war crimes, constitutional restoration of the secular provisions that the military governments had removed, and economic development. In its early years, it pursued these goals with a degree of success that generated genuine popular support.

But from around 2013-2014 onwards, the structural dynamics that Khan's framework had identified as characteristic of the postcolonial state began to operate more visibly and more destructively. The expansion of the government's repressive apparatus, the systematic manipulation of electoral processes, the use of the legal system against political opponents, the cultivation of personal loyalty networks in the bureaucracy and military, and above all the progressive conversion of liberation war memory from a historical resource into a political weapon against all forms of opposition, together constituted what Khan analyzed as the fullest expression yet of the permanent state's absorption of elected government.

The specific mechanism through which this process operated was what Khan analyzed as the return of the colonial logic: the process by which the formal structures of democratic governance were retained while their substantive content was hollowed out from within. Elections continued to be held, but under conditions that guaranteed predetermined outcomes. Courts continued to function, but in ways that systematically favored the ruling party. Media continued to publish, but under a combination of legal pressure and economic incentive that produced self-censorship rather than independent journalism. The appearance of democratic normality was maintained while the substantive mechanisms of democratic accountability were systematically dismantled.

This analysis, which Khan developed through a series of critical interventions over the period of the Hasina governments, was deeply controversial and earned him significant political hostility from the ruling party and its supporters. He was accused of giving intellectual cover to Islamist political forces, of undermining the democratic project by destabilizing a government that whatever its faults was better than the available alternatives, and of being motivated by personal grievances rather than genuine analytical concerns. Khan's consistent response to these accusations was to insist that structural critique must be distinguished from partisan opposition, and that the intellectual's responsibility to honest analysis did not terminate when the government in power claimed to represent the heritage of liberation.

15.7 Khan and the 2024 Uprising: Interpretation and Intellectual Intervention

The mass student uprising of July-August 2024 that brought down the Hasina government represented both a confirmation of Khan's analytical framework and a new challenge to its application. The confirmation lay in the uprising's specific character: it was not organized by any of the existing political parties, did not represent the interests of any specific class fraction, and articulated demands for accountability and systemic reform rather than for a specific alternative

political program. This profile precisely fits Khan's analysis of the dynamics of the diverted revolution: the popular aspirations that the liberation movement had expressed, having been systematically frustrated by the structural dynamics of the permanent state, erupted again in a new form that bypassed the existing political channels and directly confronted the authoritarian consolidation of state power.

The challenge to Khan's framework lay in the question of what comes next. His analysis of the structural dynamics of the postcolonial state predicted that the political possibilities created by mass uprisings would tend to be foreclosed by the same dynamics of elite capture and institutional inertia that had foreclosed previous moments of political possibility. The question was whether the 2024 uprising, with its specific character and its specific political context, contained within it the resources to resist these dynamics more effectively than previous uprisings had done.

In his interventions in the period following the uprising, Khan took a characteristically nuanced position: welcoming the uprising as a genuine expression of popular political consciousness, analyzing carefully the structural conditions that would determine whether its possibilities could be realized, and insisting that the intellectual's responsibility in this moment was to provide structural analysis rather than political enthusiasm. At the Bangladesh Future Forum 2026, he was among the prominent voices addressing questions of political settlements, institutional reform, and the reconfiguration of state-citizen relationships in the aftermath of the uprising, bringing to these discussions the analytical framework he had developed over four decades of engagement with the structural dynamics of Bangladeshi political life.

15.8 The Question of India: Khan's Structural Analysis and Its Explosive Implications

Few aspects of Khan's political theory have generated more controversy or more political heat than his analysis of Bangladesh's relationship with India. This analysis, developed across multiple essays, interviews, and public interventions over many years, operates on multiple levels simultaneously: the structural level of regional geopolitics, the historical level of the specific dynamics of the 1971 liberation and its aftermath, and the cultural-political level of the ways in which the India question is managed, or suppressed, in Bangladeshi public discourse.

At the structural level, Khan's analysis begins from the basic geopolitical fact of Bangladesh's situation: a small, densely populated, economically vulnerable state surrounded on three sides by a much larger, more powerful, and more economically developed neighbor. This basic geopolitical asymmetry creates structural pressures toward dependency that operate regardless of the specific intentions of either government, and that are expressed through a wide range of economic, political, and cultural mechanisms.

The economic dimension of this dependency is the most straightforward to document: Bangladesh's trade relationship with India is characterized by significant structural asymmetry, with Indian goods having relatively easy access to the Bangladeshi market while Bangladeshi goods face various formal and informal barriers to the Indian market. The water-sharing arrangements governing the major rivers that flow through both countries have consistently favored Indian interests over Bangladeshi ones. And the various infrastructure and connectivity

projects that have been developed in the Bangladesh-India relationship, while having genuine economic benefits for Bangladesh, also tend to deepen the structural integration in ways that increase rather than reduce Bangladeshi dependency.

The political dimension is more complex and more sensitive. Khan's analysis, particularly as developed in his December 2024 interview and his subsequent interventions, argues that India has pursued a consistent policy of maintaining Bangladesh in a position of political dependency, using its influence over the narrative of the 1971 liberation war and its relationships with key Bangladeshi political figures and institutions to maintain a degree of effective veto power over Bangladeshi political development that is incompatible with genuine sovereignty.

This argument generated fierce debate in the context of Bangladesh's post-2024 political landscape, particularly as it touched directly on the question of India's relationship with the Hasina government. There is substantial evidence, which Khan has cited and analyzed, that the Indian government had been a close supporter of the Hasina government's authoritarian consolidation, regarding the government's predictability and its management of security concerns, including cross-border terrorism and the Rohingya crisis, as more important than its democratic deficits. The fall of the Hasina government in 2024, followed by a perceptible cooling in Bangladesh-India relations, provided a specific political context in which Khan's structural analysis of India's relationship with Bangladeshi politics acquired direct political relevance.

The controversy around this analysis reflects a genuine difficulty: the question of how to distinguish structural analysis of geopolitical power relationships from nationalist political polemics is not always easy to resolve in practice, and Khan's critics have argued with some force that his analysis of India's role in Bangladeshi politics has at times crossed the line from structural critique into nationalist antagonism. Khan has consistently rejected this characterization while acknowledging that the India question is one that requires especially careful analysis precisely because it sits at the intersection of genuine structural power asymmetries and the always-available temptation of nationalist sentiment.

15.9 Khan's Constitutional Theory: Reform and the Question of Structural Transformation

Khan's engagement with constitutional questions in Bangladesh is an important and often underappreciated dimension of his political theory. Trained as a lawyer at the University of Dhaka before going on to study economics and then to develop his theoretical work in philosophy and cultural studies, Khan has consistently brought to his political analysis an attention to constitutional and legal frameworks that distinguishes him from many intellectuals whose primary concerns are cultural and literary.

His constitutional theory begins from the same structural analysis that informs his political theory more broadly: the recognition that constitutional frameworks in Bangladesh have been systematically manipulated to serve the interests of the permanent state and the political elite rather than the democratic aspirations of the population. The constitutional history of Bangladesh is, in Khan's analysis, a history of constitutional mutation in which successive amendments have

progressively weakened the accountability mechanisms and the rights protections that the original 1972 constitution, however imperfect, had attempted to establish.

The Fifth Amendment, introduced under the Zia military government, legitimized the military coups of 1975 and altered the constitutional framework in ways that formalized the political Islam that the military governments were cultivating as a political resource. The Seventh Amendment, under Ershad, further consolidated military political power. And the Fifteenth Amendment, introduced under the Hasina government in 2010, restored some of the original constitutional provisions while simultaneously introducing provisions that would eventually be used to justify the elimination of the caretaker government system, with consequences for electoral integrity that Khan analyzed as a major step toward the authoritarianism that the 2024 uprising ultimately rejected.

Khan's constitutional theory advocates for a framework that would genuinely empower democratic accountability mechanisms: an independent judiciary with genuine constitutional review powers and genuine protection from political interference, an electoral system with genuine independence from government control, a parliamentary structure that would prevent the concentration of all effective power in the executive, and constitutional protections for civil society, media, and academic freedom that would be enforceable rather than merely decorative.

But Khan's constitutional theory is not merely technical or institutional. It is grounded in the same structural analysis of power that informs his broader political theory. Constitutional frameworks, in his analysis, cannot by themselves produce democratic governance if the social and political conditions for democratic governance, including an active and genuinely independent civil society, a political culture that values accountability and transparency, and economic conditions that do not make the majority of citizens entirely dependent on political patronage, are absent. Constitutional reform is necessary but not sufficient: it must be accompanied by the social and cultural transformation that his work in the tradition of Sofa and Razzaq has consistently argued is the deeper challenge.

15.10 The Rohingya Crisis as Test of the Framework: Between Solidarity and Structural Analysis

The Rohingya crisis, which placed Bangladesh at the center of one of the most significant humanitarian emergencies in Asia in the late 2010s and early 2020s, provides an important test of the analytical framework that Khan has developed, precisely because it is a crisis that simultaneously engages the structural analysis of geopolitics, the political theory of the Bangladeshi state, and the ethical theory of human rights and humanitarian obligation.

Khan's analysis of the Rohingya crisis draws on several elements of his theoretical framework. At the geopolitical level, he analyzes the crisis in terms of the structural dynamics of the regional balance of power: the Myanmar government's persecution of the Rohingya as an expression of Burmese ethnic nationalism operating within the context of a regional geopolitical competition in which China's growing influence in Myanmar intersects with India's concerns about Bangladeshi political stability and with Bangladesh's own difficult position of hosting over a million refugees with inadequate international support.

At the level of Bangladeshi domestic politics, Khan analyzes the management of the Rohingya crisis in terms of the dynamics of the permanent state and the specific political calculations of successive Bangladeshi governments. The decision to provide initial asylum to Rohingya refugees reflected both genuine humanitarian solidarity and political calculation about international image and donor support. The subsequent management of the refugee population, in ways that have kept it separated from Bangladeshi civil society, prevented refugees from acquiring legal status or economic rights, and relied on an increasingly fraught relationship with international humanitarian organizations, reflects the structural dynamics of a state that prioritizes security management over humanitarian principle.

The most important contribution of Khan's framework to the analysis of the Rohingya crisis is its insistence that adequate responses to humanitarian crises require not merely emergency management but structural analysis of the political and economic conditions that produce them. The persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar is not an accidental or purely ethnic phenomenon. It is the expression of specific structural arrangements of state power, economic interest, and nationalist ideology that can be analyzed and challenged. The international community's response to the crisis, which has focused primarily on humanitarian relief rather than on the structural conditions that produce it, reflects the limitations of a humanitarian framework that Khan's political theory identifies as characteristic of the global management of postcolonial crises more generally.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: COMPARATIVE POLITICAL THEORY

Points of Agreement, Productive Dispute, and the Internal Architecture of a Tradition

16.1 The Question of Democracy: Three Versions of a Shared Commitment

All three figures share a commitment to democracy, but the specific content of this commitment differs significantly among them in ways that have both theoretical and practical implications. Understanding these differences is essential for understanding both the intellectual tensions within the tradition and the specific contributions that each figure makes to the tradition's overall political theory.

Razzaq's conception of democracy is pluralist and process-oriented: it emphasizes the importance of multiple competing centers of political power, the development of institutional mechanisms for the management of conflict and the accountability of power, and the cultivation of a political culture in which the peaceful resolution of political differences through agreed procedures is valued and practiced. He is skeptical of direct democracy and of revolutionary politics, not because he is indifferent to social transformation but because he believes that the conditions for sustainable political change require the patient development of institutional foundations that neither direct democracy nor revolutionary politics are well-equipped to build.

Sofa's conception of democracy is more cultural than institutional: it emphasizes the relationship between genuine democratic politics and a specific quality of public discourse, specifically a

discourse organized around honest inquiry and genuine critical engagement rather than around political performance and ideological mobilization. For Sofa, democracy is not primarily about institutional forms but about the character of public intellectual life: a democracy in which the intellectual class is servile and opportunistic, providing political legitimation rather than critical analysis, is not genuinely democratic regardless of its formal institutional structure.

Khan's conception of democracy is more explicitly social and structural: it emphasizes the relationship between democratic political institutions and the social and economic conditions that determine whether those institutions can function genuinely democratically in practice. Drawing on the tradition of socialist democracy and on the postcolonial critique of liberal democracy, Khan argues that formal democratic institutions are insufficient for genuine democratic governance in conditions of severe economic inequality, colonial inheritance, and structural dependency. Genuine democracy requires not merely the formal institutions of representative government but the substantive conditions, economic, educational, and cultural, that enable genuine democratic participation.

These three conceptions of democracy are not contradictory, and they converge on a shared critique of the actually existing democratic institutions of Bangladesh as radically inadequate. But they emphasize different aspects of what adequate democratic institutions would require, and these differences have implications for how each figure analyzes specific episodes and how each positions himself in relation to specific political developments.

16.2 The Question of Islam and Politics: The Most Contested Terrain

The relationship between Islamic religious identity and democratic political life is perhaps the terrain on which the differences among the three figures are most significant and most consequential, because it is the question on which the political culture of Bangladesh has been most deeply and most destructively polarized.

Razzaq's position on this question is characteristically nuanced and strategically indirect. He did not subscribe to the secularist thesis that Islamic identity is inherently incompatible with democratic political life, a thesis he regarded as reflecting a specific Western cultural history that was not applicable in the Bangladeshi context. But he was equally skeptical of Islamist political programs that sought to organize political life around Islamic normative principles in ways that would require the subordination of democratic political institutions to religious authority. His position was broadly continuous with the traditions of Islamic political thought that sought to harmonize Islamic normative commitments with democratic political governance, without requiring either the suppression of Islamic identity or the subordination of democratic institutions to religious authority.

Sofa's position is more complex and has been more controversial. His analysis of Bengali Muslim cultural consciousness, as discussed in Chapter Fourteen, insists on the genuine complexity of Bengali Muslim identity in ways that make simple secularist or Islamist positions both inadequate. But Sofa was also consistently critical of the political deployment of Islamic identity for purposes that he regarded as fundamentally anti-democratic: the use of religious sentiment to mobilize political opposition to secular political programs, the rehabilitation of

political forces that had collaborated with the Pakistani military in 1971 in the name of Islamic solidarity, and the development of political organizations whose primary agenda was the restriction of individual freedoms in the name of Islamic moral norms.

Khan's position on the relationship between Islam and politics is the most theoretically sophisticated and also the most politically complex of the three. Drawing on his Lacanian framework, he analyzes the appeal of Islamist political programs in terms of the specific psychic economy of postcolonial subjects: the way in which the fantasy of an Islamic political community organized around shared religious values responds to the experienced failures of secular nationalist politics to deliver genuine equality, human dignity, and social justice.

This analysis does not endorse Islamist political programs, which Khan regards as deeply problematic in their implications for equality, human rights, and genuine democratic governance. But it seeks to understand the social and psychological conditions that make such programs appealing, and thereby to identify the kinds of political and cultural transformation that would address those conditions rather than merely suppressing their symptoms. The implication is that the most effective response to Islamist political movements is not secular nationalist repression but the genuine realization of the democratic values that the liberation movement articulated and that Islamist movements, in their own distorted way, are also expressing in response to the systematic failure of those values to be realized.

16.3 The Question of Class: How Much Weight Does Economic Structure Carry?

All three figures accept that class analysis is an important tool for understanding Bangladeshi political life, but they differ significantly in how much explanatory weight they assign to economic class structure relative to other analytical variables.

Razzaq's class analysis, while sophisticated and detailed, operates within a broadly liberal pluralist framework that assigns class economic interests an important but not exclusive role in political dynamics. The political agency of individuals and groups is not reducible to their class position: cultural identities, religious commitments, personal loyalties, and political judgments all play roles in shaping political behavior that cannot be entirely derived from class analysis. Razzaq was accordingly skeptical of Marxist theories that assigned explanatory priority to class structure over all other social variables, even as he drew extensively on Marxist sociological analysis in his empirical investigations.

Sofa's relationship to class analysis was more explicitly Marxian in some respects, particularly in his analysis of the relationship between intellectual production and the interests of the ruling class. His account of intellectual servility is grounded in an analysis of the material interests that incline intellectuals toward political conformity, and his critique of the cultural institutions of independent Bangladesh consistently connects cultural phenomena to the class interests they serve. But Sofa's literary and cultural analysis also gave him a strong sense of the relative autonomy of cultural phenomena from economic determination, and his work is not reducible to vulgar Marxist base-superstructure analysis.

Khan's framework is the most explicitly Marxist of the three, incorporating not only the class analysis of the political economy tradition but the more sophisticated frameworks of Western Marxism, including Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses. But Khan's deployment of Marxist analysis is complicated and inflected by his Lacanian framework, which introduces a dimension of psychic investment and unconscious motivation that pure Marxist class analysis cannot accommodate.

The result is a theoretical synthesis in which class structure and class interest are important determinants of political dynamics but operate through the mediation of cultural and psychic mechanisms that give them a complexity and unpredictability that pure class analysis cannot capture. Class position shapes but does not determine political identification: subjects in similar class positions can and do make different political investments depending on the specific cultural and psychic formations that organize their relationship to their social world.

16.4 Internal Debates and Their Significance: The Tradition's Most Generative Tensions

The most intellectually productive dimension of the relationship among the three figures is the set of genuine disagreements that have characterized it across its three generations, disagreements that are not merely personal or temperamental but reflect genuinely different analytical frameworks, different intellectual orientations, and different assessments of the political priorities of the Bangladeshi context.

The most fundamental of these disagreements concerns the relationship between intellectual analysis and political commitment. Razzaq maintained throughout his career a position of principled political non-identification: he was committed to analyzing political life honestly without committing himself to specific political parties or political programs. This position of analytical distance was not political indifference; Razzaq cared deeply about the political conditions of Bangladesh and was genuinely committed to the democratic aspirations of the liberation movement. But he believed that the intellectual's specific contribution to political life was analytical, not partisan, and that the analytical function was best served by maintaining independence from specific political commitments.

Sofa was more willing to take explicit political positions and to argue for them in public, though he was deeply resistant to becoming a political partisan in any simple sense. His commitment was to intellectual honesty, and he was willing to follow its implications wherever they led, including into positions that conflicted with the political alliances that might have been personally or professionally advantageous. But his public intellectual practice was more directly engaged with specific political controversies than Razzaq's, and his analyses were more readily appropriated by various political factions as support for their specific positions.

Khan has been the most politically engaged of the three, both in terms of his public interventions and in terms of his willingness to support or oppose specific political developments explicitly. This engagement reflects both his theoretical framework, which insists on the political character of all intellectual work and therefore resists the claim that analytical independence requires political non-engagement, and his specific historical location in a period of intense political

polarization in which analytical neutrality was difficult to maintain without appearing complicit with authoritarian governance.

These differences have been a source of tension within the tradition, particularly between Sofa's conception of intellectual honesty as requiring a certain distance from political commitment and Khan's insistence that intellectual responsibility requires political engagement. But they have also been a source of the tradition's richness: the existence of this tension within the tradition has kept it from collapsing into political partisanship on one side or politically sterile academicism on the other.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: APPLICATIONS AND TESTS

How the Theories Perform Against the Evidence of Bangladeshi History

17.1 The Language Movement as Theoretical Test: Multiple Frameworks, One Event

The Bengali Language Movement of 1952 is the most important event in the prehistory of Bangladesh: the moment at which the democratic aspirations of the Bengali Muslim population crystallized into political action with the force and clarity to change the course of history. But the Language Movement is also, for our analytical purposes, a test of the theoretical frameworks developed by the three figures, because each framework generates specific predictions about what kind of event it was and what political consequences it could be expected to produce.

Razzaq's framework predicts that the Language Movement's political energy would be captured by existing political organizations and converted into a resource for their own power aspirations rather than generating genuinely new forms of political organization. This prediction is confirmed by the subsequent political history: the Language Movement's political energy was absorbed by the Awami League and became a legitimating resource for the party's political program rather than the foundation for a new kind of democratic politics.

Sofa's framework predicts that the intellectual class's response to the Language Movement would combine genuine cultural commitment with an incapacity to sustain the political implications of that commitment: intellectuals would celebrate the language martyrs and commemorate their sacrifice in ways that reproduced the cultural meaning of the event without following through on the political program it implied. This prediction is also broadly confirmed: the Language Movement became a sacred cultural occasion in Bangladeshi national life without the political transformation that its spirit demanded.

Khan's framework predicts that the fantasy of the Language Movement as a founding moment of pure popular democratic will would function as a political resource for subsequent political actors, enabling the mystification of actual political interests and the legitimation of power arrangements that contradicted the democratic aspiration the movement expressed. This is perhaps the most analytically demanding of the three predictions, and also the most broadly

confirmed by the political uses to which the Language Movement memory has been put across the subsequent decades of Bangladeshi political history.

17.2 The Liberation War as Political Event: Structural Analysis of a Revolutionary Moment

The Liberation War of 1971 is the most intensely analyzed event in Bangladesh's political history, and the theoretical frameworks of our three figures generate complex and sometimes contradictory analyses of its character, its significance, and its political implications.

All three figures agree that the Liberation War was a genuinely popular political event, not merely a military operation or an elite political project. The mass participation of ordinary Bangladeshis in the liberation struggle, at the cost of enormous suffering, reflected a genuine popular will for independence that had deep roots in the specific historical experience of the Bengali Muslim population under Pakistani rule.

But the frameworks diverge significantly in their analyses of the political character of this popular will and what it implied for the possibilities of post-liberation political development. Razzaq's framework emphasizes the institutional vacuum that the liberation struggle created: the absence of the organizational structures, constitutional frameworks, and political institutions that genuine democratic self-governance requires. The liberation movement created an extraordinary collective political energy but did not, in the time available to it, develop the institutional foundations that would have been necessary to translate that energy into sustainable democratic governance.

Sofa's framework emphasizes the cultural dimension: the liberation struggle created conditions for a genuine renewal of Bengali cultural and intellectual life, but this renewal required the development of an intellectual culture capable of honest critical engagement rather than nationalist celebration. The failure to develop such an intellectual culture was, in his analysis, as consequential for Bangladesh's political future as the failure of institutional development.

Khan's framework adds the structural dimension of the specific political settlement through which independence was achieved: the role of Indian military intervention in determining the specific form of liberation, the specific balance of political forces at independence, and the specific character of the state that was established. The liberation's structural conditions, in Khan's analysis, predetermined certain aspects of the post-liberation political dynamics in ways that the dominant narrative of the liberation movement, focused on popular heroism and political aspiration, systematically obscured.

17.3 The 1975 Coup and the Long Political Crisis: A Structural Analysis

The August 1975 coup, which killed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of his family and initiated the period of military political dominance that lasted until 1990, is one of the most politically traumatic events in Bangladeshi history and one that all three figures analyzed with great care and with conclusions that were, in various ways, politically unwelcome.

Razzaq's analysis, developed in private conversations with his students and subsequently reconstructed in their accounts, was characteristically structural: the coup was not primarily an expression of the specific failings of the Mujib government, nor of the ambitions of specific military officers, but of the structural dynamics that his theory of the postcolonial state had identified as likely to produce exactly this kind of outcome. The concentration of political power in the hands of a single party and leader, without the development of institutional accountability mechanisms that could have counteracted the structural tendencies toward authoritarianism, created conditions in which the permanent state apparatus, specifically the military leadership, was able to act with minimal organized resistance.

This analysis was received with great discomfort by many of Razzaq's students and admirers, because it seemed to imply a degree of structural inevitability about the political catastrophe that felt uncomfortably close to a justification of it. Razzaq was at pains to distinguish between structural analysis and political justification: explaining why something happened, in terms of the structural conditions that made it likely, is not the same as endorsing it or suggesting it could not have been otherwise. But the distinction, while analytically correct, is politically difficult to maintain in conditions of acute political grief.

Sofa's analysis was more explicitly moral and less structurally deterministic. He saw the coup as an expression of the failure of genuine revolutionary consciousness in the Bangladeshi political class: the liberation struggle had mobilized extraordinary popular energy, but the political leadership had failed to develop the kind of democratic consciousness and institutional commitment that could have sustained genuine democratic governance in the face of economic crisis and political pressure. The coup was, in this sense, the political consequence of a cultural failure: the failure to develop the kind of intellectual and moral integrity that genuine democratic politics requires.

Khan's analysis connected the coup to his concept of the diverted revolution: the political settlement that independence had produced was never capable of sustaining genuine democratic governance, and the coup represented not an interruption of the democratic process but the culmination of the structural dynamic that the diverted revolution had set in motion. The real question was not why the coup happened but why it did not generate a more powerful and organized democratic resistance, and the answer lay in the structural conditions that the diverted revolution had created.

17.4 The Ershad Period as Analytical Case Study: Military Legitimation and Civilian Clientelism

The Ershad period, from the 1982 coup through the mass uprising of 1990, provides what is perhaps the most revealing case study for testing the structural analyses developed by all three figures, because it exhibits with particular clarity the specific mechanisms through which military political power operates in Bangladesh.

Hossain Muhammad Ershad came to power in a military coup against the nominally elected government of Abdus Sattar, a civilian who had been installed after the assassination of General Ziaur Rahman. His eleven-year rule combined direct military authority with a sophisticated

apparatus of civilian political legitimation. The creation of the Jatiyo Party as a political vehicle for the regime, the holding of elections under conditions that guaranteed outcomes favorable to the ruling party, the cultivation of Islamic political forces as a legitimating resource and a counterweight to the established secular parties, and the systematic use of state patronage to maintain elite political support, all exhibited the specific mechanisms that the structural analyses of our three figures had identified.

Razzaq's framework predicted precisely this combination: a military ruler would need to construct civilian political forms to achieve sustainable governance, but the political organizations constructed in this way would exhibit the specific pathologies, dynastic tendencies, patron-client mobilization, and intellectual vacuum, that the structural conditions of Bangladeshi politics produced. This prediction was confirmed with remarkable precision.

Sofa's framework predicted that the intellectual class would largely accommodate itself to the Ershad regime, providing the cultural and political legitimation that any stable authoritarian government requires in exchange for access to state patronage and the institutional resources that state patronage provides. This prediction was also broadly confirmed, with the significant exception of the small group of intellectuals, including Sofa himself, who maintained their critical independence throughout the period.

Khan's framework predicted that the specific character of the Ershad regime's political legitimation, its cultivation of Islamist political forces and its constitutional establishment of Islam as the state religion, would have lasting political consequences extending well beyond the formal end of the regime. The political organizations and networks of patronage that the Ershad period created, specifically the Jatiyo Party and the Islamist political organizations that flourished under its patronage, would remain significant actors in Bangladeshi politics long after Ershad's fall, complicating the political landscape in ways that made genuine democratic consolidation systematically more difficult.

17.5 The 1991-2006 Democratic Period: Competitive Oligarchy and Its Paradoxes

The return to parliamentary democracy following the mass uprising of 1990 that drove Ershad from power created conditions of genuine political competition that in some respects represented an improvement over the preceding period of military authoritarianism. The alternating governments of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Awami League provided at least a formal structure of democratic accountability, with elections that while imperfect in various ways were recognized as broadly reflective of genuine popular choice, and with a degree of press freedom and civil society activity that the preceding periods had not allowed.

But the structural analysis of our three figures generates a more complex and less optimistic assessment of this period than the simple narrative of democratic transition suggests. Razzaq's framework identifies what one might call the competitive oligarchy problem: a political system organized around two major parties that compete for electoral support but share the structural characteristics of patron-client mobilization, dynastic leadership, and intellectual clientelism is not genuinely democratic in the substantive sense even if it satisfies some formal criteria for democratic competition. The competition between the Awami League and the BNP during this

period was genuine in some respects, but it was competition between two different patronage networks rather than between two different political programs or two different conceptions of the public interest.

Sofa's framework identifies the cultural impoverishment of the period: the dominance of binary partisan politics organized around the competition between Awami League and BNP identities produced a public political culture that was structurally organized around loyalty and opposition rather than around genuine political analysis. The intellectual class was systematically recruited into one or the other partisan camp, and the space for genuine critical analysis was thereby steadily reduced even as formal political competition continued.

Khan's framework identifies the specific mechanism by which competitive oligarchy reproduced the structural dynamics of the diverted revolution in the specific conditions of democratic competition: the need for electoral support generated patron-client mobilization on a massive scale, absorbing the political energies of the poor into patronage networks rather than empowering them as genuine political agents. The structural inequalities that the three fundamental principles of the liberation movement demanded be addressed were not addressed; they were managed through patron-client distributions that reproduced dependency rather than addressing structural causes.

17.6 The 1/11 Period: The Military Returns in Civilian Costume

The political crisis of 2006-2008, culminating in the military-backed caretaker government of January 2007 through December 2008, known in Bangladesh as the One-Eleven government, provides a crucial test for the structural analyses of our three figures because it represents a new variant of the military-civilian relationship that their frameworks had analyzed.

Unlike the Ershad period, in which a military general ruled overtly under military authority before constructing a civilian political cover, the One-Eleven period involved a nominally civilian caretaker government that was in fact backed by and operating under the effective control of the military intelligence apparatus. This arrangement was more sophisticated and more difficult to analyze than direct military rule, because it maintained the formal appearance of civilian governance and democratic process while exercising effective military political control through indirect mechanisms.

Razzaq's framework, with its emphasis on the permanent state as the true locus of power beneath the formal democratic institutions, was well equipped to analyze this arrangement: it was simply the permanent state exercising its power through a nominally civilian front rather than through direct military governance. The structural dynamic was identical; only the surface appearance had changed.

Sofa's framework predicted that many Bangladeshi intellectuals would provide legitimation for the One-Eleven arrangement, either because they genuinely believed that the political dysfunction of the preceding period justified military intervention or because they calculated that alignment with the new government served their institutional interests. This prediction was confirmed: many leading Bangladeshi intellectuals initially supported or acquiesced in the One-

Eleven arrangement, only gradually becoming critical as the government's authoritarian practices became more visible.

Khan's framework provides the most analytically sophisticated treatment of the One-Eleven period through its analysis of the fantasy of political rectification: the culturally powerful narrative that Bangladesh's political problems were primarily problems of corrupt political parties that could be addressed by a neutral technocratic government operating outside the framework of partisan politics. This fantasy, which was genuinely widely believed and genuinely reflected real frustrations with the dysfunction of competitive oligarchy, provided the ideological foundation for the One-Eleven arrangement. Khan's analysis of how this fantasy functioned, as a mechanism for mystifying the structural dynamics of the permanent state while appearing to address them, is one of the most penetrating specific applications of his Lacanian framework to Bangladeshi political analysis.

17.7 The Hasina Decades (2009-2024): The Most Complete Expression of the Diverted Revolution

The government of Sheikh Hasina that dominated Bangladeshi politics from 2009 through the August 2024 uprising is the political episode that most fully expresses the structural dynamics that the analytical frameworks of all three figures had identified. Its specific trajectory, from democratic mandate through progressive authoritarianism to the final collapse of its political authority in the face of mass popular uprising, illustrates with unusual clarity both the explanatory power of the structural analyses developed in the tradition and the specific mechanisms through which the diverted revolution operates in contemporary Bangladeshi conditions.

The government began with a genuine democratic mandate and a program that included several elements of the structural reform agenda that the tradition had consistently demanded: accountability for liberation war crimes, constitutional restoration of secular provisions, and a commitment to economic development with social dimensions. In its early years, the war crimes tribunal, whatever its specific procedural controversies, represented a genuine attempt to address the impunity of those who had perpetrated crimes against humanity in 1971, an attempt that the tradition had consistently argued was essential for genuine historical justice and genuine democratic political culture.

But the structural dynamics that the tradition's analyses had identified as endemic to the postcolonial state began to operate more visibly as the government consolidated its power. The progressive elimination of competitive political conditions, the systematic manipulation of institutional structures to ensure the government's continuity, the expansion of the security apparatus's repressive reach, and the conversion of the liberation war legacy from a historical resource into a political weapon against all opposition, together constituted what Khan analyzed as the fullest expression yet of the permanent state's absorption of elected government in the form of the single-party dominant system.

The specific mechanism of this absorption is important for understanding both the theory and the historical process. The Hasina government was not simply a military regime in civilian clothing,

as the Ershad government had been. It was a genuinely civilian political organization that had developed a mass popular base through decades of political organization and had genuine political commitments, including to the liberation war heritage and to certain forms of economic development. The process of authoritarian consolidation was therefore not a simple case of military power asserting itself over civilian politics but a more complex process of a civilian government progressively adopting the structural characteristics of the permanent state even as it formally represented the legacy of democratic liberation.

Khan's framework is uniquely well positioned to analyze this complexity, because it insists on the distinction between formal political character and structural political logic. A civilian government can reproduce the structural logic of the permanent state without ceasing to be formally civilian. The mechanisms through which this happens, the progressive subordination of institutional accountability to executive authority, the conversion of patron-client networks into mechanisms of political control, and the use of nationalist ideology to delegitimize opposition, are not uniquely military phenomena. They are structural phenomena that can operate through civilian political organizations that have accumulated sufficient power and sufficient institutional resources.

17.8 The July-August 2024 Uprising: Revolution or Episode?

The mass student uprising that began in July 2024 and ultimately brought down the Hasina government in August 2024 is the most significant political event in Bangladesh since the liberation of 1971, and it demands analysis through the theoretical frameworks of our three figures, both as a test of those frameworks and as a demonstration of their continuing relevance.

All three frameworks converge on a crucial analytical question: was the 2024 uprising a new moment of revolutionary possibility, comparable to the liberation moment of 1971 in its capacity to generate genuine structural transformation, or was it another episode in the recurring pattern of popular mobilization followed by elite capture that the structural analyses of all three figures had identified as characteristic of Bangladeshi political dynamics?

The uprising itself, with its specific character of youth-led, non-partisan, ideologically pluralist mass protest organized through digital networks and driven by specific demands for institutional accountability, was in some respects genuinely novel. It did not fit the pattern of previous mass political movements in Bangladesh, which had been organized primarily by established political parties using existing political networks. The specific trigger of the movement, protests against a quota system in government employment that was perceived as a form of political patronage disguised as affirmative action, reflected a specifically contemporary set of political concerns: concerns about meritocracy, transparency, and the relationship between political loyalty and economic opportunity that were shaped by the specific conditions of the neoliberal economy in which the uprising's participants had grown up.

But the underlying structural conditions that the uprising expressed, the gap between the democratic aspirations of the population and the structural reality of a political system organized around patronage and authoritarian control, were precisely the structural conditions that the tradition had been analyzing for decades. The uprising was novel in its form and in some of its

specific political demands; it was continuous with the long political history of Bengali democratic aspirations in its deep motivations and its structural drivers.

The immediate aftermath of the uprising, as of 2025-2026, has provided preliminary evidence relevant to the question of revolutionary episode versus structural transformation. The formation of an interim government, the beginning of institutional reform processes, and the political realignments among the established political parties have all exhibited some of the structural dynamics that the tradition's analyses had predicted: elite adaptation, institutional inertia, and the competition among established political forces to capture the political possibilities created by the uprising.

But there are also elements of the post-uprising political landscape that do not fit straightforwardly into the tradition's predictive framework: the specific character of the young generation that led the uprising, their apparent resistance to capture by established political parties, their capacity to organize through digital networks in ways that are less easily controlled by traditional political patronage mechanisms, and their specific demands for structural institutional reform rather than merely for a change in the political leadership, suggest possibilities for a different kind of political dynamics than previous moments of popular mobilization had generated.

The analytical tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan does not generate simple predictions about the outcome of the current political moment. What it provides is a structural analysis of the conditions and dynamics that will determine whether the possibilities the uprising has created can be realized, and a set of analytical tools for evaluating the evidence as it accumulates. This is the function that genuine political theory serves: not prediction in the manner of an oracle but analysis in the manner of a diagnostician, providing the conceptual framework necessary for accurate observation and assessment of what is happening and why.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: CONTROVERSIES IN POLITICAL THEORY

The Internal and External Debates That Have Shaped and Tested the Tradition

18.1 The Farhad Mazhar Controversy: An Intellectual Schism and Its Meaning

Few episodes in the intellectual history of the tradition illuminate its internal tensions and external challenges as vividly as the protracted and multi-dimensional controversy between Salimullah Khan and Farhad Mazhar. This controversy, which developed across the 2000s and 2010s through public debates, written exchanges, and the increasingly divergent political alignments of the two figures, is not merely a personal or political dispute. It is a fundamental disagreement about the most basic questions of political theory, and its analysis reveals both the intellectual richness and the political complexity of the tradition.

Farhad Mazhar began his intellectual career in positions that were in many respects aligned with the tradition of Sofa and Khan: he was a critic of the dominant cultural and political

establishment, a voice for radical political alternatives, and a theorist who drew on a complex mixture of Marxist and Islamic intellectual resources. His early work on peasant politics and development, and his sustained engagement with questions of ecology, political economy, and subaltern politics, earned him a reputation as one of the most original voices in Bangladeshi intellectual life.

The schism between Mazhar and Khan developed through a series of specific episodes in which their political judgments diverged sharply, revealing underlying theoretical differences that had been partially masked by their earlier apparent alignment. The most important of these episodes was the controversy over the 2011 film *Meherjaan*, which attempted to present a narrative of the 1971 liberation war that gave sympathetic attention to West Pakistani characters. Khan was sharply critical of the film, arguing that its representation of 1971 distorted the historical record and effectively rehabilitated Pakistani military conduct. Mazhar took a more sympathetic position toward the film and its directors.

The deeper theoretical difference that this episode revealed concerned the question of how to evaluate the liberation war politically. Khan's position, consistent with his structural analysis of the diverted revolution and his insistence on the three fundamental principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice as the normative touchstone of the liberation struggle, maintained that the liberation war was a genuinely popular democratic movement whose political significance could not be reduced to a narrative of competing personal experiences across the political divide. Mazhar's position moved increasingly toward what critics characterized as a revisionist interpretation that, whatever its stated intentions, had the effect of relativizing the political significance of the liberation war and thereby undermining one of the crucial foundations of democratic political legitimacy in Bangladesh.

The Shahbagh Movement of 2013, which organized mass public demands for the capital punishment of liberation war criminals convicted by the war crimes tribunal, brought the schism to its most acute point. Khan supported the movement as an expression of genuine popular democratic demand for accountability, though he also brought his structural analysis to bear on the political uses to which the movement was subsequently put by the Awami League government. Mazhar was bitterly critical of the movement, characterizing it in terms that his critics found indistinguishable from the arguments used by Islamist political forces against the war crimes tribunal.

From Khan's analytical perspective, Mazhar's trajectory illustrated exactly the kind of intellectual degeneration that Sofa had analyzed: the movement from genuine critical engagement to a form of contrarianism that, in its insistence on opposing whatever was supported by the secular liberal establishment, ended up providing intellectual cover for political forces whose agenda was deeply antithetical to the democratic and humanistic values that had motivated his original intellectual project.

The deeper theoretical question raised by this controversy concerns the relationship between intellectual radicalism and political responsibility. Genuine critical intelligence requires the capacity to question dominant narratives and established political alignments. But not all questioning of dominant narratives represents genuine critical insight: some forms of intellectual

contrarianism reflect not deeper analytical penetration but a disposition toward opposition that can serve genuinely retrograde political purposes. The boundary between genuine critique and what might be called performative radicalism is not always easy to draw, and the Mazhar controversy is one of the most instructive examples in the intellectual history of Bangladesh of the consequences of failing to maintain that boundary.

18.2 The Conspiracy Theories Around Razzaq's Silence: What Did He Know?

The long silence of Abdur Razzaq in the published record, combined with his extraordinary intellectual influence in private, has generated a range of conspiracy theories and counter-narratives about the nature and content of his political thinking that deserve analysis both for what they reveal about the politics of intellectual culture in Bangladesh and for the genuine analytical questions they raise.

The most persistent of these conspiracy theories concern Razzaq's alleged knowledge of the 1975 coup in advance. Given his close relationships with both Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and some of the military officers who were involved in the coup, and given his analytical framework's apparent prediction of exactly the kind of political crisis that culminated in the coup, some observers have suggested that Razzaq had specific foreknowledge of the plot and failed to warn Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This allegation has been made in various forms, ranging from the relatively mild claim that Razzaq saw political violence coming and did not do enough to prevent it, to the more extreme claim that he was complicit in some way in the planning or preparation of the coup.

These allegations have no substantial evidentiary foundation. The biographical record provides no credible evidence of any connection between Razzaq and the coup plotters, and the structural character of his predictive analysis, which operated at the level of structural tendencies rather than specific plotted events, is entirely inconsistent with the hypothesis of specific foreknowledge. What is analytically interesting about these allegations is not their substance but their genesis: they reflect the difficulty that Bangladeshi political culture has in distinguishing between structural prediction and specific foreknowledge, between the analytical capacity to identify the general direction of political dynamics and the conspiratorial possession of specific information about specific events.

The tendency to convert analytical accuracy into evidence of conspiratorial involvement is itself a symptom of one of the intellectual pathologies that Sofa analyzed: the inability to engage seriously with structural analysis that challenges dominant narratives produces a defensive move that attempts to delegitimize the analysis by attributing it to conspiratorial rather than analytical origins. If Razzaq predicted the coup it cannot be because his structural analysis was accurate; it must be because he was involved in some way. This move is both intellectually dishonest and politically revealing: it protects the dominant narrative of liberation politics from the challenge that genuine structural analysis represents.

The other significant conspiracy narrative around Razzaq concerns the alleged suppression of his work. Some admirers of Razzaq have argued that his failure to publish was not entirely voluntary, that there were specific political and institutional pressures operating against his

publishing, whether through direct censorship, through the threat of legal or political repercussions, or through the systematic marginalization of intellectuals who were genuinely critical of the ruling political establishment. The evidence for this account is more substantial than the foreknowledge allegation: there were periods in Bangladeshi political history when the expression of genuinely critical political analysis in print carried real risks, and Razzaq's awareness of these risks may have contributed to his preference for private conversation over public publication.

But the full account of Razzaq's non-publication cannot be reduced to political suppression. The evidence from his students' accounts suggests that his reluctance to publish was genuinely his own, reflecting his specific intellectual personality and his specific conception of the relationship between genuine thinking and institutional recognition. The political risks of publication were real but were not, on the evidence, the primary reason for his choice.

18.3 Sofa's Controversial Relationships: Personal and Political Complexity

Ahmed Sofa's personal life was as complex and as controversial as his intellectual life, and the relationship between the two dimensions has been the subject of considerable speculation and debate in the decades since his death in 2001. His relationships with women, his engagement with political organizations of various persuasions over the course of his career, and his sometimes difficult relationships with other major intellectual figures of his generation have all generated controversy that has affected the reception of his intellectual work.

The most analytically important of these controversies, for the purposes of political theory, concerns his relationship to the Awami League and its political project. Sofa was simultaneously one of the most perceptive critics of the Awami League's political failings and a figure whose emotional and intellectual connections to the liberation movement and its legacy gave him a relationship with the Awami League that was never simply adversarial.

His critics on the right characterized him as an Awami League intellectual whose criticisms of the party were essentially those of an insider, someone committed to the party's fundamental political project even as he criticized specific aspects of its practice. His critics on the left, including some in the tradition of radical political thought that he influenced, argued that his critique of the party was insufficiently structural: that he identified and condemned specific failings without adequately interrogating the underlying class interests that made those failings structurally predictable.

Sofa's own position, as best as it can be reconstructed from his published work and recorded conversations, was that both of these critiques missed the essential character of his political project. He was not a partisan of any political party, and his criticism of the Awami League was as fundamental as his criticism of its opponents. But he was a partisan of the democratic aspirations that the liberation movement had expressed, and he refused to abandon that partisanship simply because the political organizations that claimed to embody those aspirations consistently failed to do so.

This position is philosophically sophisticated and politically difficult: it requires maintaining a commitment to specific political values while refusing to reduce those values to the political programs of any existing party. It is exactly the kind of intellectual position that the tradition, at its best, has consistently modeled. But it is also a position that is inherently unstable in conditions of intense political polarization, where the space for non-partisan commitment to democratic values is systematically narrowed by the dynamics of partisan competition.

18.4 Khan and the Question of Islamist Politics: The Most Contested Accusation

The most politically sensitive controversy in Khan's intellectual career concerns the allegation, made by various critics across the political spectrum, that his analyses of Islamist political movements in Bangladesh have been effectively sympathetic to those movements even when formally critical of them. This allegation has been made in different forms by different critics: some argue that his structural analysis of the appeal of Islamist politics, by seeking to understand rather than condemn, provides de facto legitimation; others argue that his criticisms of the secular liberal establishment, including his critique of the Awami League's authoritarianism, have had the effect of benefiting Islamist political forces even if this was not his intention.

Khan has responded to these allegations with consistent clarity: the analysis of the conditions that generate political phenomena is not the same as the endorsement of those phenomena, and the refusal to engage in structural analysis because it might provide unwelcome comfort to political forces one opposes represents a form of intellectual cowardice that ultimately serves political authoritarianism.

This response is analytically correct, but it does not fully address the legitimate concern that underlies the accusation. In conditions of intense political polarization, the intellectual who provides structural analysis of the conditions that generate Islamist political movements, without simultaneously providing equally sustained critical engagement with the specific political programs of those movements, can in practice contribute to a political environment in which those movements are normalized or legitimated in ways that go beyond the intentions of the analysis.

Khan is well aware of this political dynamic, and his work on Islamist politics has generally sought to maintain the balance between structural understanding and critical assessment that genuine intellectual honesty requires. But the balance is difficult to maintain consistently across the full range of specific political controversies in which the question arises, and his critics have not been entirely wrong to identify moments in his work where the balance has tilted in ways that required correction.

18.5 The India Question and Its Explosive Political Implications

The controversy around Khan's analysis of India's relationship with Bangladesh, which has been most acute since his December 2024 interview and his subsequent interventions in the post-uprising political debate, is one of the most complex and most politically charged controversies in his intellectual career.

The difficulty of the India question for Bangladeshi political theory is structural and deep. Bangladesh's relationship with India is fundamental to its political, economic, and security situation in ways that make it impossible to analyze honestly without generating political controversy. Any honest analysis of India's geopolitical interests in Bangladesh, of the specific ways in which Indian government policy has at various points supported or undermined Bangladeshi democratic development, and of the structural asymmetries that characterize the Bangladesh-India relationship, will necessarily generate political controversy in a context where the India question is so thoroughly entangled with domestic political alignments.

The specific charge against Khan on this question is that his post-2024 analysis of India's relationship with the Hasina government, and by extension with Bangladesh more broadly, has veered into anti-Indian nationalism in ways that are not supported by the structural analysis he offers. His critics argue that his analysis of India's role in Bangladeshi politics assigns more agency and more malign intent to Indian policy than the evidence supports, and that the political consequences of this analysis in the specific post-2024 political context are potentially dangerous.

Khan's defense is that his analysis is structural rather than nationalist: it is concerned with the specific mechanisms through which geopolitical power operates in the Bangladesh-India relationship and with the specific political choices that have been made by Indian policy-makers in relation to Bangladeshi domestic politics, not with any claim about Indian intentions or Indian identity in general. Whether this defense is fully satisfactory as an account of all his specific interventions is a question that requires careful reading of those interventions, and reasonable analysts disagree on the answer.

What is clear is that the India question represents one of the most important and most under-analyzed dimensions of Bangladeshi political theory, and that Khan's willingness to engage with it seriously, whatever the specific analytical controversies that engagement has generated, represents an intellectual courage that the tradition has consistently valued.

18.6 Accusations of Inconsistency: Politics, Position, and the Question of Intellectual Integrity

A final category of controversy that has attended the work of all three figures, but most visibly Khan, concerns the question of intellectual consistency over time. The charge of inconsistency is both a legitimate analytical concern and a frequently deployed political weapon, and distinguishing between these two uses is essential for evaluating it.

The legitimate analytical concern is genuine: a thinker who criticizes the authoritarian tendencies of one government while supporting or acquiescing in the authoritarian tendencies of another government that shares his political sympathies raises a genuine question about whether his analytical framework is genuinely structural or merely partisan. If Razzaq's structural analysis predicts authoritarianism regardless of which party is in power, then it should generate criticism of authoritarianism regardless of which party is in power. If Sofa's critique of intellectual servility applies only to intellectuals who serve governments he opposes, then it is not a structural critique but a partisan polemic. If Khan's analysis of the permanent state identifies

structural dynamics that operate independently of which party holds formal political power, then it should generate similar analyses regardless of the political identity of the government in question.

These are legitimate analytical questions, and the intellectual tradition at its best applies structural analysis consistently across political alignments. But the charge of inconsistency also functions as a political weapon in a specific way: it is deployed by those who have been the subject of structural critique to suggest that the critique is politically motivated rather than analytically grounded. The Hasina government and its supporters made this charge against Khan consistently: his criticisms of the government were characterized not as structural analyses but as expressions of political hostility that contradicted his earlier positions. The charge gained some traction precisely because, in conditions of political polarization, the maintenance of analytical consistency is genuinely difficult and imperfect.

The honest assessment is that all three figures have shown both analytical consistency, in the sense of deploying structural frameworks across different political contexts, and political complexity, in the sense of reaching specific political judgments that were shaped by the specific historical contexts in which they were formed and that did not always emerge directly from their structural frameworks. This complexity is not a defect of the tradition but a feature of the relationship between analytical frameworks and historical judgment: no analytical framework, however powerful, generates unambiguous prescriptions for every specific political situation, and the intellectual who pretends otherwise is either self-deceived or intellectually dishonest.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: THE JURISPRUDENTIAL DIMENSION

Constitutional Theory, Legal Philosophy, and the Architecture of Justice in Bangladesh

19.1 Law as a Site of Political Theory: Why Jurisprudence Matters

The relationship between political theory and legal philosophy has been a consistent theme in the tradition we have been examining, reflecting both the specific training of some of its key figures (Khan holds both LL.M. and LL.B. degrees from Dhaka University) and the structural importance of constitutional and legal frameworks in determining the actual content of political life in Bangladesh. Legal institutions, in the analytical frameworks of all three figures, are not merely technical instruments for the management of social disputes. They are sites where the fundamental questions of political power, social justice, and the relationship between state and citizen are negotiated, contested, and provisionally resolved.

Razzaq's engagement with legal and constitutional questions, while not systematic in the manner of a professional legal scholar, was informed and sophisticated. His training in political economy at the London School of Economics under Laski had given him a strong sense of the relationship between constitutional frameworks and the distribution of social power, and his analysis of the colonial and postcolonial state consistently attended to the specific ways in which legal and constitutional arrangements mediated the exercise of political power.

His most important jurisprudential insight was what one might call the thesis of legal instrumentalization in postcolonial conditions: the tendency of the legal system in postcolonial states to be used as an instrument of political power rather than as a mechanism of justice and accountability. In the colonial context, the legal system had been an instrument of colonial governance: its formal equality before the law masked the systematic inequality of political conditions that determined who could effectively claim and enforce legal rights. In the postcolonial context, legal instrumentalization continued under new political conditions: the legal system was used by successive governments as an instrument for managing political opposition, legitimizing the extension of executive power, and protecting the interests of the political and economic elite from the demands of democratic accountability.

19.2 Constitutional Design and Its Political Implications in Bangladeshi History

The specific constitutional history of Bangladesh is both a subject of deep political controversy and an important test case for the political theories developed by our three figures. The 1972 constitution, drafted in the immediate aftermath of independence, was a document that embodied many of the democratic aspirations of the liberation movement: it established parliamentary governance, guaranteed fundamental rights, provided for an independent judiciary, and incorporated secular and socialist principles as foundational commitments.

But the constitutional history of Bangladesh since 1972 has been a history of progressive mutation, as successive governments have used constitutional amendment to legitimate their own political arrangements and to remove the accountability constraints that the original constitution had attempted to establish. The Fifth, Seventh, and Fifteenth Amendments represent the most significant of these mutations, each reflecting the specific political interests of the government that introduced them and collectively constituting a pattern of constitutional manipulation that the structural analyses of all three figures had identified as characteristic of the postcolonial state.

Khan's analysis of this constitutional history, the most systematic of the three, draws on the jurisprudential tradition of constitutional democracy to argue that the specific pattern of Bangladeshi constitutional mutation reflects not merely the self-interest of specific governments but the structural condition of a constitutional framework that lacks adequate mechanisms for its own protection. A constitution is only as strong as the political culture that supports it and the institutional mechanisms that enforce it. In Bangladesh, both the political culture of democratic constitutionalism and the institutional mechanisms of constitutional enforcement have been systematically weak, creating conditions in which constitutional amendment is easily available as a political resource for the party in power.

The specific constitutional questions that have been most hotly contested in Bangladesh, including the caretaker government system, the role of Islam in the constitution, the independence of the judiciary, the protection of fundamental rights, and the distribution of power between executive and legislature, are all questions that the tradition's political theory addresses directly and with considerable analytical depth. The caretaker government controversy is particularly revealing: the system of neutral caretaker governments to oversee elections, introduced by the Thirteenth Amendment in 1996, represented an attempt to address the specific structural problem of electoral manipulation by incumbent governments. Its abolition by the

Fifteenth Amendment in 2011 removed one of the few institutional mechanisms for electoral accountability that Bangladeshi constitutional development had produced, with the predictable consequence that the electoral processes of 2014, 2018, and 2024 (prior to the uprising) were widely characterized as failing to meet basic standards of democratic integrity.

19.3 The Independence of the Judiciary: Theory and Reality in Bangladesh

All three figures converge on the importance of judicial independence as a foundational requirement for genuine constitutional democracy, but their analyses of the specific conditions and mechanisms necessary for judicial independence in the Bangladeshi context differ in significant ways.

Razzaq's analysis of judicial independence is grounded in his broader analysis of the institutional conditions for genuine democratic governance: an independent judiciary requires not merely formal constitutional provisions but a judicial culture and a set of institutional norms that enable judges to resist political pressure in practice. In Bangladesh, the development of such a culture has been systematically inhibited by the structural conditions of the postcolonial state: the appointment of judges through political processes that favor political reliability over judicial independence, the susceptibility of judicial careers to political influence through the formal and informal mechanisms of promotion and assignment, and the absence of a robust professional culture of judicial independence that could provide institutional protection against political pressure.

Sofa's engagement with the question of judicial independence was less systematic than Razzaq's but characteristically penetrating in its observation of the specific cultural dimensions of the problem. His observation that Bangladesh's legal culture was characterized by a pervasive deference to power, expressed through the preference for procedural compliance over substantive justice and through the systematic avoidance of decisions that would challenge the political establishment, reflected a cultural dimension of the judicial independence problem that purely institutional analyses tended to miss.

Khan's analysis connects the judicial independence problem to his broader analysis of the permanent state and its mechanisms of reproduction. The judiciary, in his framework, is one of the institutional components of the permanent state: it has a degree of structural autonomy relative to the specifically political components of the state, but this autonomy operates within limits set by the broader structure of state power. The judiciary's formal independence does not guarantee its substantive independence, because the conditions under which judicial decisions are made, including the social backgrounds of judges, their relationships to the political elite, their awareness of the consequences of challenging political authority, and the professional incentives that shape their career decisions, all operate to constrain substantive judicial independence even in the absence of direct political interference.

19.4 Human Rights Theory in the Bangladeshi Context: Law, Politics, and Moral Philosophy

The question of human rights occupies a complex position in the intellectual tradition we are examining. All three figures are deeply committed to the values that human rights discourse articulates, but all three are also sophisticated in their analysis of the relationship between formal human rights frameworks and the actual conditions under which rights are or are not protected in practice.

Razzaq's engagement with human rights was characteristically indirect: rather than engaging with the formal international human rights framework that was developing during his active intellectual period, he focused on the specific conditions in Bangladesh, economic, political, institutional, and cultural, that determined whether rights could in practice be claimed and enforced. His analysis converged with that of later human rights scholars who have argued that the protection of human rights in practice requires not merely formal legal recognition but the development of the social, economic, and political conditions under which rights claims can be effectively made and effectively enforced.

Sofa's engagement with human rights was more directly moral and cultural: he was concerned above all with the conditions of genuine human dignity, which he analyzed as requiring not merely the formal protection of civil and political rights but the cultural conditions that enable genuine human self-realization. His analysis of the servile intellectual was, at its deepest level, an analysis of what it means to deny human dignity: to reduce human beings to instruments of political or economic power rather than recognizing and respecting their capacity for genuine autonomous thought and genuine self-determination.

Khan's engagement with human rights theory is the most theoretically sophisticated, drawing on the tradition of critical legal studies and on postcolonial critiques of international human rights law to develop a framework that takes seriously both the genuine importance of human rights as normative commitments and the structural limitations of the international human rights system in addressing the specific conditions of postcolonial states.

His most important jurisprudential contribution on the human rights question concerns the relationship between individual rights and structural injustice. The standard liberal framework for human rights focuses primarily on the protection of individuals against the arbitrary exercise of state power. This framework has genuine value in addressing specific abuses of state authority. But it is, in Khan's analysis, structurally inadequate for addressing the specific forms of rights violation that are most characteristic of postcolonial conditions: the violation of rights that results not from the arbitrary exercise of state power but from the structural arrangements of political economy, cultural hierarchy, and institutional organization that systematically deny entire populations the conditions necessary for genuine rights enjoyment.

The right to education, in Khan's framework, is not merely a right not to be prohibited from attending school. It is a right to the conditions of genuine educational development, which in the Bangladeshi context requires a Bengali-medium educational system that does not structurally disadvantage the majority of the population by conducting education in a foreign language that they can only imperfectly access. The right to political participation is not merely a right to vote in elections. It is a right to the conditions of genuine democratic participation, which requires both the formal institutional conditions of competitive elections and the substantive social

conditions, economic security, literacy, access to information, and freedom from patron-client dependence, that enable genuine political judgment and genuine political agency.

This substantive account of human rights goes significantly beyond what the international human rights framework formally provides, but it is, in Khan's analysis, what the rights truly require if they are to have genuine rather than merely formal significance.

CHAPTER TWENTY: THE ETHICAL DIMENSION

Moral Philosophy, Political Ethics, and the Question of Intellectual Responsibility

20.1 The Ethics of Intellectual Labor: The Tradition's Deepest Moral Commitment

The three figures who are the subject of this textbook shared, despite their many differences, a fundamental moral commitment that can be identified as the ethical core of the tradition: the commitment to intellectual honesty as a form of moral and political responsibility. This commitment, which appears in different but recognizably related forms in the practice of all three figures, is the tradition's deepest ethical contribution and the dimension in which its relevance to the present is most direct and most urgent.

Razzaq's version of this commitment expressed itself primarily through his refusal to provide the kind of institutional and political validation that his position and reputation would have made easy and profitable. He could have published systematic works that would have earned him international academic recognition. He could have attached himself to specific political movements in ways that would have provided institutional support and public platforms. He could have provided the political legitimation that successive governments would have been glad to receive from a figure of his intellectual standing. He chose none of these things, at the cost of a certain institutional marginalization that his intellectual influence ultimately transcended.

Sofa's version expressed itself primarily through his willingness to say publicly, in print and in person, what he actually thought regardless of the political and personal consequences. His willingness to criticize both the Awami League and its opponents, to challenge both the secular nationalist and the Islamist narratives of Bengali Muslim identity, and to subject both the political establishment and the intellectual establishment to the same rigorous analytical scrutiny, required a moral courage that was exceptional in the political culture of his time and place.

Khan's version has expressed itself through the sustained and systematically developed intellectual project of structural analysis: the commitment to following the analytical implications of his theoretical framework wherever they lead, regardless of which political forces are thereby served or challenged, and the willingness to sustain this commitment through periods of intense political pressure and personal controversy.

20.2 The Ethics of Political Engagement: When to Speak and When to Stay Silent

All three figures have, at various points in their intellectual careers, confronted the question of when political engagement requires public speech and when intellectual integrity requires strategic silence. The different answers they have given to this question reflect both their different intellectual personalities and their different assessments of the specific political conditions in which they have operated.

Razzaq's general preference was for silence in the public register and speech in the private register. This preference reflected his assessment that in the specific political conditions of Bangladesh, public speech by intellectuals was systematically captured by political forces that used it for partisan purposes, and that the most durable and most politically significant intellectual work was done in the private conversations and teaching relationships where genuine dialogue was possible. This assessment was not wrong, though it carried the cost that Razzaq's analytical achievements remained largely inaccessible to the broader public during his lifetime and became fully visible only through the retrospective reconstructions of his students.

Sofa's preference was for public speech, but a specific kind of public speech: the speech of the intellectual who speaks from the position of analytical independence rather than from the position of political alliance, and who is willing to say things that are politically inconvenient regardless of which political forces they inconvenience. This preference reflected his assessment that the intellectual's specific contribution to democratic political culture was made through the practice of honest public discourse, and that the abdication of public speech in the name of intellectual purity was itself a form of political complicity.

Khan's practice has sought to combine both orientations: the systematic development of analytical frameworks through sustained theoretical work, and the public intellectual engagement that brings those frameworks to bear on specific political controversies. This combination is not always easy to maintain, as the controversies discussed in Chapter Eighteen demonstrate. But it reflects a genuine attempt to honor both the analytical rigor that Razzaq modeled and the public intellectual courage that Sofa exemplified.

20.3 The Ethics of Teaching: Pedagogy as Political Practice

All three figures were fundamentally teachers, in the widest sense of the word: they were committed to the transmission of analytical capacity, critical consciousness, and intellectual integrity to younger generations. This pedagogical commitment was not secondary to their intellectual work but constitutive of it: the tradition has been transmitted not primarily through published texts but through the living relationships of teaching and learning.

Razzaq's pedagogy, the most distinctive and the most extensively documented, was organized around the cultivation of genuine analytical capacity rather than the transmission of specific doctrines. His method of teaching through questioning, through Socratic engagement, through the strategic deployment of apparently naive questions that forced his students to examine the assumptions underlying their own thinking, was designed to produce thinkers rather than disciples. The contrast between this pedagogical practice and the standard model of Bangladeshi higher education, organized around the transmission and reproduction of authorized knowledge,

was itself a powerful political statement about the relationship between education and intellectual freedom.

Sofa's pedagogy was exercised less through formal institutional teaching than through his written work and his public intellectual practice. His essays and his novel were, in a specific sense, pedagogical documents: they were designed to teach his readers to see the intellectual and political culture of Bangladesh with a clarity and honesty that the culture itself systematically impeded. The pedagogy of exposure, making visible what has been systematically rendered invisible, requires a distinctive combination of analytical precision and rhetorical power that Sofa possessed to an unusual degree.

Khan's pedagogy has been conducted through his academic teaching at various institutions, his public lectures and talks (the Center for Advanced Theory at ULAB has provided an important institutional platform for this), and his prolific writing for both academic and general audiences. His development of courses on Freudian psychoanalysis and on the modern history of South Asia, his series of public lectures on ethics from Aristotle to Badiou, and his sustained engagement with younger scholars through the Center for Advanced Theory, reflect a pedagogical practice that combines theoretical rigor with public accessibility in ways that are directly continuous with the tradition established by his predecessors.

20.4 Conspiracy, Moral Accountability, and the Ethics of Allegation

The tradition has been the subject of various conspiracy theories, as discussed in Chapter Eighteen, and these theories raise genuine ethical questions about the relationship between intellectual analysis, political allegation, and moral accountability.

The ethical question is complex: on one hand, intellectual figures who exercise significant political influence through their analyses and public interventions are properly subject to scrutiny, including scrutiny of possible gaps between their stated analytical positions and their actual political motivations. On the other hand, the systematic characterization of analytical positions as expressions of conspiratorial motivation, without adequate evidentiary foundations, is a form of intellectual dishonesty that serves the interests of those who wish to delegitimize genuine critical analysis.

The tradition's own ethical framework provides the relevant standard here: the same commitment to intellectual honesty that it demands of its protagonists must apply to the analysis of those protagonists themselves. Allegations about the motivations and relationships of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan must be assessed on the basis of evidence rather than political interest, and the burden of evidence for serious allegations of conspiratorial motivation or political complicity must be high.

By this standard, most of the specific conspiracy theories that have circulated about these figures do not meet the evidentiary threshold for serious credibility. The allegations of Razzaq's foreknowledge of the 1975 coup, the accusations of Sofa's covert alliance with various political forces, and the accusations of Khan's sympathy for Islamist politics, are all more adequately explained as expressions of the political culture's tendency to convert analytical accuracy into

evidence of conspiratorial involvement than as reflections of actual evidence about the figures' political conduct.

This does not mean that all aspects of the tradition's political engagements are beyond criticism. The legitimate critical questions, concerning the consistency of the tradition's application of its analytical framework across different political contexts, the adequacy of its engagement with dimensions of Bangladeshi social life that it has not fully analyzed, and the specific political judgments that its major figures have made and their analytical foundations, are questions that deserve serious engagement. But they deserve engagement through the same intellectual honesty and analytical rigor that the tradition itself demands, not through the politics of allegation and conspiracy theory that it has consistently analyzed and criticized.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: THE TRADITION AND THE CONTEMPORARY

Political Theory in 2025-2026 and the Questions That Remain

21.1 The Post-2024 Political Landscape and the Tradition's Analytical Resources

The Bangladesh of 2025-2026 is a country navigating a genuinely unprecedented political moment. The fall of the Hasina government in August 2024, followed by the formation of an interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, has created conditions of political possibility that are more open than at any point since the immediate aftermath of independence in 1971. The specific character of this openness, the questions it poses and the dangers it contains, can be most adequately analyzed through the frameworks that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has developed.

The most urgent political question in the post-2024 landscape is the question of constitutional design: how to reconstruct the institutional framework of Bangladeshi governance in ways that provide genuine accountability, genuine democratic competition, and genuine protection of civil and political rights, without replicating the structural dynamics that have repeatedly undermined democratic governance in the past. This is a question to which the tradition's jurisprudential and constitutional theory speaks directly.

The specific recommendations that emerge from the tradition's analytical framework for constitutional design are several and systematic. They include the restoration and strengthening of the caretaker government mechanism, or the development of equivalent institutional arrangements that guarantee electoral integrity without exposing the electoral process to manipulation by incumbent governments. They include the constitutional entrenchment of genuine judicial independence, with appointment mechanisms that remove judicial selection from the control of the politically connected. They include the development of genuine parliamentary accountability mechanisms that prevent the concentration of all effective power in the executive, including specific provisions for parliamentary oversight of military and intelligence budgets and operations. And they include constitutional protections for civil society, academic freedom, and media independence that are enforceable rather than merely declaratory.

But the tradition's most important contribution to the post-2024 political moment is not any specific constitutional recommendation but the structural analytical framework that enables the assessment of whether institutional reforms are genuinely addressing the structural conditions of the postcolonial state or are merely redistributing the mechanisms of that state's reproduction under new political management. The test of genuine constitutional transformation in Bangladesh is not whether the formal constitutional documents are improved but whether the structural dynamics of elite capture, patron-client mobilization, and permanent state power are actually disrupted. This is the test that the tradition's analytical framework consistently applies.

21.2 The Educational System as the Deepest Site of Political Transformation

The tradition's consistent insistence on the educational system as the most fundamental site of political transformation is, if anything, more urgent in the post-2024 political moment than at any previous point in Bangladeshi political history. The uprising of 2024 was led by students, and its specific trigger was a controversy about educational employment quotas that reflected the specific ways in which the educational system was experienced by the generation that led the uprising as a mechanism of structural injustice rather than of opportunity and development.

Khan's analysis of the educational system as an ideological state apparatus that reproduces colonial hierarchies is not merely theoretical. It has direct practical implications for the specific reforms that would be necessary to transform the educational system into a genuine instrument of democratic empowerment. These implications include the progressive shift to Bengali as the primary medium of higher education, the reform of the curriculum to reflect the specific intellectual and cultural heritage of Bangladesh rather than the inherited frameworks of colonial education, and the democratization of the institutions of knowledge production to include the diverse communities whose experience and perspective has been systematically excluded from the officially sanctioned knowledge systems.

None of these reforms is easily achieved. They require not merely political decisions but the sustained development of new intellectual and cultural institutions: Bengali-medium universities that genuinely maintain academic standards, publication systems that can produce the textbooks and research literature necessary for Bengali-medium advanced education, and a research culture that values the specific knowledge produced through engagement with Bangladeshi social reality rather than merely importing and applying frameworks developed for very different contexts.

The tradition's intellectual project, taken as a whole, represents a contribution to this longer-term institutional project: it has demonstrated that rigorous, sophisticated, and analytically powerful intellectual work can be done in Bengali and from the specific perspective of Bangladeshi intellectual and cultural life, and that the genuine resources for this kind of intellectual work are available in the tradition that the three figures represent.

21.3 The Regional Geopolitical Context: Bangladesh Between India, China, and the Global Order

The post-2024 political landscape in Bangladesh is embedded in a regional geopolitical context of extraordinary complexity and volatility, and the tradition's analytical frameworks, while

developed primarily in relation to Bangladeshi domestic politics, provide important resources for understanding the specific dynamics of this context.

The most fundamental geopolitical fact of Bangladesh's situation, the asymmetric relationship with India, has become more rather than less politically significant in the post-2024 landscape. The perception, widely shared among the student activists who led the 2024 uprising, that India had been a consistent supporter of the Hasina government's authoritarian consolidation, generated significant anti-Indian sentiment in the immediate aftermath of the uprising. This sentiment, while reflecting genuine grievances about specific aspects of Indian policy toward Bangladesh, also carried the danger of a nationalist simplification that would reduce the complex structural dynamics of the Bangladesh-India relationship to a simple narrative of Indian imperialism and Bangladeshi resistance.

Khan's structural analysis of the Bangladesh-India relationship provides the most adequate framework for navigating this complexity. His insistence that the relationship must be analyzed in terms of structural power asymmetries and specific political decisions rather than in terms of Indian cultural essence or conspiratorial intent enables a form of political engagement with the relationship that is neither the uncritical deference that the preceding decades of Bangladeshi-Indian political relationship had sometimes exhibited nor the simplistic nationalist antagonism that the post-2024 political moment has sometimes encouraged.

The China question adds a further dimension of complexity. China's growing economic and political presence in Bangladesh, through infrastructure investment, trade relationships, and political engagement, represents an alternative source of geopolitical alignment that the post-2024 political landscape has made more salient. The tradition's analytical framework, with its consistent focus on the structural conditions that determine whether external relationships serve or undermine Bangladeshi democratic development, provides the relevant analytical lens for assessing what China's increasing engagement with Bangladesh means for the structural conditions of Bangladeshi political life.

The answer that emerges from applying this framework is not a simple endorsement or rejection of Chinese engagement but a structural question: do the specific forms of Chinese economic and political involvement in Bangladesh reproduce the structural dynamics of dependency and elite capture that Bangladeshi political development has consistently encountered, or do they create conditions that support genuine structural transformation? The answer to this question, which requires detailed empirical analysis of specific economic arrangements and political relationships, is not predetermined by the analytical framework. The framework specifies the question and provides the analytical tools for answering it; the answer must be determined by the evidence.

21.4 Climate Change as Political Theory: The Tradition Encounters Its Most Novel Challenge

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan developed its analytical frameworks primarily in engagement with specifically political, cultural, and historical questions. The question of climate change, which has become one of the most urgent challenges facing Bangladesh in the

contemporary period, was not a central preoccupation of any of the three figures in their active intellectual periods, and the tradition does not have the same depth of analytical engagement with climate questions that it has with questions of political structure, cultural identity, and historical development.

But the tradition's analytical frameworks are not without relevance to the climate question. Bangladesh is among the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world: its low-lying delta geography makes it acutely susceptible to the sea level rise, increased cyclonic intensity, and altered monsoon patterns that climate change is producing. The political implications of this vulnerability, including the specific ways in which climate-related displacement and resource scarcity interact with the structural dynamics of the Bangladeshi political system, demand the kind of structural political analysis that the tradition provides.

The most important contribution of the tradition's framework to climate analysis is its insistence on the structural character of the political conditions that determine whether climate vulnerability translates into climate catastrophe. Climate change does not affect all Bangladeshis equally: its most devastating effects fall primarily on the poorest and most structurally vulnerable populations, those who live in the most exposed areas, who have the fewest resources for adaptation, and who are the most dependent on the political system for protection and support. The distribution of climate impacts is, in this sense, a political phenomenon as much as a physical one, and the analysis of that distribution requires exactly the kind of structural political analysis that the tradition provides.

The connection between climate vulnerability and the structural dynamics of the postcolonial state is direct: a state organized around patron-client relationships and elite capture is structurally ill-equipped to manage climate adaptation fairly and effectively. The resources available for climate adaptation tend to flow through the same patronage networks that structure other forms of resource distribution, concentrating in politically connected areas and populations rather than being allocated according to actual vulnerability. The institutions responsible for climate adaptation, like all other state institutions in the tradition's analysis, are susceptible to the same dynamics of elite capture that have characterized Bangladeshi political development more broadly.

This means that the development of genuinely effective climate adaptation strategies in Bangladesh requires not merely technical solutions to technical problems but the same structural political transformation that the tradition has consistently argued is necessary for genuine democratic development. The climate question is, in this specific sense, a political question, and the tradition's political theory is directly relevant to its analysis.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: THEORETICAL SYNTHESIS AND PROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS

What the Tradition Has Achieved and What It Demands

22.1 The Achievement: What Three Generations of Structural Analysis Have Produced

Assessed comprehensively and rigorously, the intellectual achievement of the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan in the specific domain of political theory is substantial and in some respects extraordinary. What the tradition has accomplished is the development of a structural political theory of Bangladesh that is simultaneously historically grounded, analytically rigorous, and practically relevant: a theory that can explain the major political dynamics of Bangladeshi history, generate accurate predictions about the general direction of political developments, and provide the conceptual framework necessary for identifying genuine possibilities for political transformation.

This is not a trivial achievement. The history of political theory in the postcolonial world is filled with frameworks developed for very different contexts and applied with insufficient attention to the specific structural conditions of postcolonial politics, frameworks that generate misleading analyses and inadequate prescriptions. The tradition we have been examining has avoided this pitfall by insisting on the specificity of the Bangladeshi political context while maintaining connections to the broader theoretical resources of political science, sociology, philosophy, and psychoanalysis.

The specific analytical achievements that the tradition has generated in the domain of political theory include, but are not limited to, the structural analysis of the postcolonial state's relationship to colonial inheritance, the theory of elite capture and its specific mechanisms in the Bangladeshi context, the analysis of the fantasy structure of Bangladeshi political identity and its political consequences, the constitutional theory that identifies the structural conditions for genuine democratic governance, the jurisprudential analysis of law as a site of political power rather than a neutral mechanism of justice, and the educational theory that identifies the school system as a fundamental site of democratic political formation rather than merely a technical instrument of human capital development.

Each of these analytical achievements is significant independently. Taken together, they constitute a comprehensive framework for analyzing the structural conditions of Bangladeshi political life that has no adequate equivalent in the existing literature on Bangladeshi politics, either in English or in Bengali.

22.2 The Limitations: Where the Framework Needs Extension

The tradition's analytical framework, despite its considerable achievements, has genuine limitations that must be acknowledged if the tradition is to be honestly assessed and genuinely developed.

The most significant limitation is the relative inadequacy of the tradition's engagement with the gender dimension of Bangladeshi political and social life. The structural analyses developed by Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan are primarily analyses of class, cultural identity, and political power that give insufficient attention to gender as a structural dimension of political inequality. This is not merely a matter of omission. The specific dynamics of gender inequality in Bangladesh, the ways in which patriarchal power structures interact with class structure, colonial inheritance, and

religious normative frameworks to produce specific forms of political and social exclusion, are dimensions of the overall structural analysis that the tradition has not adequately addressed.

The significance of this limitation has been highlighted by the 2024 uprising, in which women and girls played prominent and brave roles, both as leaders and as participants, and whose demands for political accountability and institutional reform included but also exceeded the specific concerns of gender equality. The tradition's analytical framework needs to be extended to give adequate analytical weight to the gender dimension of structural political inequality in Bangladesh.

A second significant limitation is the tradition's relatively underdeveloped engagement with the experience and perspective of religious and ethnic minorities in Bangladesh. The analysis of Bengali Muslim identity, which is the central focus of the tradition's cultural and political analysis, does not provide an adequate framework for understanding the specific political and cultural conditions of Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, indigenous ethnic groups, and other minorities whose experience of the Bangladeshi political system differs fundamentally from that of the Bengali Muslim majority.

The tradition's commitment to democracy and human dignity formally extends to all members of the Bangladeshi political community, but the specific analytical frameworks that the tradition has developed have been shaped primarily by the experience of the Bengali Muslim majority, and their application to the specific conditions of minority communities requires significant extension and modification.

A third limitation concerns the tradition's engagement with the global dimensions of Bangladeshi political economy. The structural analysis of the Bangladeshi state has been conducted primarily in terms of domestic class structure, colonial inheritance, and regional geopolitics. The global dimensions of Bangladeshi political economy, specifically the dynamics of the garment industry that has been the primary engine of Bangladeshi economic development since the 1980s, the international financial institutions that have played a significant role in shaping Bangladeshi economic policy, and the broader dynamics of global capitalism and its specific implications for a country in Bangladesh's position in the global economic hierarchy, have not received the same depth of analytical attention.

These limitations do not invalidate the tradition's achievements. They indicate the directions in which the tradition needs to be extended and developed by the next generation of Bangladeshi intellectual life.

22.3 The Demands: What the Tradition Requires of Its Inheritors

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan makes specific demands of those who would inherit and continue it. These demands are both intellectual and moral, both analytical and personal, and they deserve to be articulated with the clarity and directness that the tradition itself has consistently valued.

The intellectual demands include, first, the sustained engagement with the structural analytical frameworks that the tradition has developed. This engagement is not a matter of doctrinal adherence: the tradition has not produced a fixed doctrine to which adherents must conform. It is a matter of taking seriously the analytical tools that the tradition provides, applying them rigorously and consistently to the specific questions of the present, and extending them where the evidence demands extension.

Second, the intellectual demands include the cultivation of genuine theoretical sophistication: the ability to engage with the advanced theoretical resources of philosophy, political theory, sociology, psychoanalysis, and jurisprudence at the level of rigor that the tradition's best work exemplifies. This does not mean that every scholar who works in the tradition's spirit must be a technical expert in Lacanian psychoanalysis or Gramscian political theory. It means that the analytical work done in the tradition's name must genuinely engage with the theoretical frameworks it invokes rather than merely deploying theoretical terminology as intellectual decoration.

Third, the intellectual demands include the willingness to engage honestly with the tradition's limitations, including the gender and minority limitations identified in the preceding section. This engagement requires both analytical humility, the acknowledgment that the frameworks developed by the three foundational figures are not sufficient for all the analytical tasks that the present demands, and intellectual courage, the willingness to extend the framework in directions that may be uncomfortable for those who have a stake in the tradition's existing formulations.

The moral demands are equally specific and equally demanding. They include, above all, the commitment to intellectual honesty: the willingness to follow the analytical implications of genuine thinking wherever they lead, regardless of the political consequences. In the specific conditions of post-2024 Bangladesh, this means the willingness to subject the new political actors, the organizations that have emerged from the uprising, the interim government, and the political parties that are repositioning themselves in the new political landscape, to the same structural analysis that the tradition applied to the Hasina government and its predecessors.

The tradition's commitment to intellectual honesty in conditions of political possibility is, in some ways, more difficult to maintain than in conditions of political adversity. When the political establishment is openly authoritarian, the intellectual who speaks critically has a clear moral position: truth-telling against power. When the political establishment is navigating a genuine democratic transition, the critical intellectual faces a harder question: how to provide the structural analysis that genuine political development requires without becoming an obstacle to the collaborative political work that democratic transition demands. This question does not have a simple answer, but the tradition's framework for thinking about it, the insistence on structural analysis as a form of political service rather than political opposition, provides the most adequate starting point available.

SUMMARY OF PART THREE

Part Three has conducted the most extended and detailed engagement yet with the specifically political dimensions of the intellectual tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan. Beginning with the systematic reconstruction of each figure's political theory, the textbook traced those theories through their applications to specific episodes in Bangladeshi political history, from the Language Movement of 1952 through the 2024 uprising and its aftermath.

The political theories of all three figures share a fundamental structural orientation: they analyze political dynamics in terms of the deep structural conditions that shape them, rather than in terms of the personal qualities or political programs of specific actors. This structural orientation produces analyses that are in some respects more sobering than the dominant narratives of Bangladeshi political culture, because they identify tendencies and dynamics that persist across changes in political leadership and formal political arrangements. But these analyses are also, in the deepest sense, more genuinely hopeful than either the political optimism that attributes all problems to specific bad actors or the political despair that treats structural conditions as permanently fixed: they identify structural conditions as the product of specific historical processes that can in principle be transformed through sustained political and cultural work.

The chapter on controversies engaged honestly with the specific accusations that have been made against each figure, distinguishing between legitimate analytical criticism and politically motivated delegitimization. The chapter on jurisprudence and legal philosophy examined how the tradition's political theory translates into specific positions on constitutional design, legal reform, and the organization of the justice system. The chapter on ethics addressed the tradition's deepest moral commitments and the specific demands those commitments make on intellectual practice.

The final chapters engaged with the tradition's application to the most pressing challenges of the contemporary moment: the post-2024 political landscape, the climate crisis, the regional geopolitical dynamics, and the demands that these challenges make on the tradition's analytical framework. The overall assessment that emerged is of a tradition that has achieved genuinely significant analytical accomplishments, that has genuine limitations requiring honest acknowledgment and active work to address, and that remains one of the most important intellectual resources available for understanding and engaging with the challenges that Bangladesh faces in the present moment.

Part Four will develop the jurisprudential analysis in greater depth, examining how the tradition's philosophical commitments translate into specific positions on constitutional design, legal philosophy, and the organization of justice in Bangladesh. Part Five will address cultural analysis in systematic detail, examining the tradition's engagement with literature, language, and the politics of cultural identity. Parts Six through Ten will address Islamic thought, comparative dimensions, ethics and moral philosophy, the full range of controversies, and the tradition's future respectively.

End of Part Three

PART FOUR

CONSTITUTIONAL THEORY, LEGAL PHILOSOPHY, AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF JUSTICE IN BANGLADESH

Preface to Part Four

The history of constitutionalism in Bangladesh is a history simultaneously of extraordinary aspiration and of systematic frustration, of foundational documents of genuine philosophical ambition and of the progressive dismemberment of those documents by the political forces they were designed to constrain. To study this history through the analytical frameworks of Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan is to encounter one of the most instructive case studies in the global literature on postcolonial constitutional development: a case in which the tensions between formal constitutional design and the structural realities of political power are exhibited with a clarity and an intensity that makes Bangladesh simultaneously a warning and, in the current moment of 2026, a tentative source of qualified hope.

Part Three examined the political theories of the three figures in systematic detail and traced their applications to specific episodes in Bangladeshi political history. Part Four now descends to the specifically legal and jurisprudential dimension of those political theories: the constitutional frameworks, the legal philosophies, and the theories of justice that underlie the broader political analyses, and their confrontation with the extraordinary sequence of events that has reshaped Bangladeshi constitutional life between 2024 and 2026. This is the period that has, in some respects, provided the most intensive real-time test that the tradition's analytical frameworks have ever been subjected to: the fall of the Hasina government, the formation of the Yunus interim government, the ambitious constitutional reform agenda of 2024-2025, the July Charter, the February 2026 elections and constitutional referendum, and the return of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party to power with a two-thirds parliamentary supermajority. Each of these developments requires analysis through the theoretical lenses that the tradition provides.

The jurisprudential dimension of the tradition is the dimension least explored by existing scholarship on Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, and its exploration in this Part is therefore both an analytical and a reconstructive undertaking. None of the three figures produced a systematic treatise in legal philosophy in the manner of H.L.A. Hart or Ronald Dworkin. But all three engaged deeply and seriously with questions of constitutional design, legal legitimacy, judicial independence, and the relationship between law and justice, and from their engagements a coherent and sophisticated jurisprudential framework can be reconstructed that has direct relevance to the constitutional questions that Bangladesh confronts today.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: CONSTITUTIONAL THEORY IN THE RAZZAQIAN FRAMEWORK

Law as the Institutional Form of Political Power

23.1 The Constitutional Problematic: Razzaq's Point of Departure

Abdur Razzaq never wrote a treatise on constitutional theory. He never published a systematic account of how constitutions function, how they should be designed, or what relationship they bear to the political societies they attempt to govern. But the constitutional problematic, the set of questions about how formal legal frameworks relate to the actual exercise of political power and to the aspirations of democratic self-governance, was present throughout his intellectual work as a persistent and organizing concern.

His point of departure was one that he shared with Harold Laski and with the broader tradition of pluralist democratic theory: the recognition that constitutions do not govern societies. People govern societies, in the context of institutional arrangements that distribute power, allocate authority, and establish the rules within which political conflict is managed. Constitutions are, in this framework, neither neutral instruments for the organization of political life nor mere facades behind which real political power operates undisturbed. They occupy an intermediate position: they shape and constrain the exercise of power in genuinely significant ways, but they do so always within the context of the social, economic, and political conditions that determine who has the capacity and the willingness to use constitutional mechanisms and who does not.

This intermediate position is precisely what makes constitutional theory interesting and difficult. If constitutions were simply the organizational expressions of whatever power arrangements existed in a society at a given moment, then constitutional design would be merely technical and constitutional analysis would reduce to power analysis. If constitutions were genuinely autonomous legal systems with the capacity to override power arrangements simply by virtue of their legal authority, then constitutional design would be the master key to political organization and constitutional violations would be self-correcting. The reality, as Razzaq understood from his analysis of colonial and postcolonial political development in South Asia, is more complex and more politically interesting than either of these simplifications allows.

Constitutions matter, but not infinitely. They shape the distribution of political advantage, the repertoire of available political strategies, and the normative standards against which political conduct is evaluated. They create focal points around which political coalitions can form, and they provide the discursive resources through which political actors legitimate or delegitimize their own conduct and that of their opponents. But they do not operate independently of the power arrangements in which they are embedded, and a constitution designed for a society very different from the one in which it actually operates will tend to be bent, circumvented, or progressively reshaped to fit the actual political realities until it either reflects those realities more accurately or is replaced by something that does.

This understanding of the relationship between constitutional form and political substance provides the essential framework for evaluating the constitutional history of Bangladesh, because that history is preeminently a history of the interaction between constitutional aspirations and political realities that have consistently resisted those aspirations.

23.2 The 1972 Constitution: A Document of Political Philosophy

The original constitution of Bangladesh, adopted in November 1972, is among the most philosophically ambitious constitutional documents produced in South Asia in the postcolonial period. It drew on multiple constitutional traditions, including the Westminster parliamentary system, the fundamental rights traditions of both Indian and universal human rights law, and the specifically Bangladeshi political aspirations of the liberation movement, to produce a document that attempted to institutionalize the democratic, secular, and socialist aspirations that had motivated the independence struggle.

The four state principles enshrined in the original constitution, nationalism, democracy, secularism, and socialism, were not merely rhetorical flourishes. They represented a genuine philosophical program for the organization of political and social life in the new state. Nationalism in this context referred specifically to Bengali cultural nationalism, the recognition that the shared cultural heritage of the Bengali people was the foundation of the new state's political community. Democracy referred to parliamentary democratic governance organized around free and fair elections, competitive political parties, and the accountability of government to parliament. Secularism referred not to the absence of religion from public life but to the equal treatment of all religious communities by the state and the non-establishment of any particular religious tradition as the basis of political authority. Socialism referred to a commitment to the reduction of economic inequality through state intervention in the economy and the protection of workers' and peasants' economic interests.

The constitutional embodiment of these principles was not perfect. The 1972 constitution has been criticized by constitutional scholars for concentrating excessive power in the prime minister, for providing inadequate protections for civil liberties, and for failing to provide adequate mechanisms for the constitutional review of legislation. But as a philosophical document, as an expression of the aspiration to organize political life in accordance with the specific democratic, secular, and egalitarian commitments that the liberation movement had articulated, it was a genuine achievement.

Razzaq's assessment of the 1972 constitution, reconstructed from his conversations and the accounts of his students, was characteristically nuanced. He recognized its achievements as a document of political philosophy while consistently drawing attention to the gap between the formal constitutional aspirations and the structural conditions necessary for those aspirations to be realized in practice. The constitution established a parliamentary system, but the social and political conditions for parliamentary democracy, including an organized and independent civil society, a politically aware and economically secure electorate, independent media, and a culture of institutional accountability, were largely absent in the Bangladesh of 1972. The result was a formal constitutional framework that was structurally vulnerable to the kinds of political manipulation that his analysis of the postcolonial state had identified as endemic.

23.3 The Constitutional Mutation Thesis

Razzaq's most important contribution to Bangladeshi constitutional theory, if it can be called that without misrepresenting the discursive form in which it was expressed, is what one might call the

constitutional mutation thesis: the argument that the progressive amendment of the Bangladeshi constitution across its political history represents not a series of specific, contingent decisions by specific political actors but the expression of a systematic structural tendency in the postcolonial political context.

The constitutional mutation thesis holds that constitutions in postcolonial states with the specific structural characteristics of Bangladesh face a systematic pressure toward the concentration of executive power, the weakening of accountability mechanisms, and the legitimization of political arrangements that serve elite interests at the expense of democratic aspiration. This pressure is not merely the product of the bad intentions of specific political actors, though bad intentions are certainly often present. It is the product of the structural incentives created by the combination of a colonial state apparatus, a concentrated economic elite with strong political connections, a weak civil society with insufficient capacity to organize effective constitutional resistance, and a political culture in which the value of democratic institutions has not been sufficiently internalized to generate the broad and sustained popular commitment to institutional protection that those institutions require.

The history of constitutional amendment in Bangladesh confirms this thesis with an evidence base that is difficult to ignore. The Fourth Amendment of 1975, which established the BAKSAL one-party system, represented the most complete constitutional expression of the structural tendency toward executive concentration. The Fifth Amendment, introduced by the Zia military government to legitimate the 1975 coups and their aftermath, demonstrated the constitutional mutation tendency operating through a different political actor: having seized power through unconstitutional means, the military government used constitutional amendment to legitimate retrospectively what it had done unconstitutionally. The Eighth Amendment, under Ershad, introduced Islam as the state religion, demonstrating the constitutional mutation tendency operating through the political instrumentalization of religious identity. And the Fifteenth Amendment of 2010, introduced under the Hasina government, demonstrated the constitutional mutation tendency operating within a formally elected civilian government: the removal of the caretaker government provisions, which had represented one of the few institutional mechanisms for limiting incumbency advantage in elections, was justified constitutionally while its practical effect was to remove a critical accountability mechanism.

This structural analysis of constitutional mutation does not imply that all constitutional amendments are equally pernicious, or that constitutional change is inherently suspect. It implies that constitutional change must be evaluated not merely on its formal constitutional merits but on its structural implications for the distribution of political power and the protection of democratic accountability mechanisms. By this criterion, the constitutional reform agenda of 2024-2025, whatever its specific merits and limitations, represents a genuine attempt to address the structural conditions that have generated the pattern of constitutional mutation, rather than merely a further episode in that pattern.

23.4 Razzaq's Theory of Constitutional Legitimacy

Behind the constitutional mutation thesis lies a deeper theory of constitutional legitimacy that Razzaq did not articulate systematically but that is implicitly present throughout his political

analysis. This theory holds that constitutional legitimacy in the genuine sense requires more than formal compliance with constitutional procedures. It requires that the constitutional framework in question has been genuinely endorsed by the political community it purports to govern, that it provides genuine mechanisms for the accountability of political power to that community, and that it reflects and protects the genuine interests of the members of that community rather than merely those of the political and economic elite.

This is a demanding standard, and no actually existing constitutional system fully meets it. But it provides a meaningful standard of evaluation that goes beyond the purely formalist criterion of whether constitutional procedures have been followed in the making and amendment of the constitution. By this standard, many of the constitutional arrangements that Bangladesh has operated under were not genuinely legitimate even when they were formally constitutional: they were formally constitutional because they were produced through constitutional procedures, but they were not genuinely legitimate because those procedures were themselves controlled by political actors who were using them to serve their own interests rather than those of the broader political community.

The corollary of this theory of constitutional legitimacy is that the most important factor in the development of genuinely constitutional governance in Bangladesh is not the specific formal design of constitutional documents but the development of the social, political, and cultural conditions that can generate genuine constitutional legitimacy. These conditions include an active and genuinely independent civil society capable of monitoring and resisting constitutional violations, a political culture that values constitutional institutions sufficiently to resist their manipulation, economic conditions that reduce the degree to which citizens are dependent on political patronage and therefore susceptible to political control, and educational institutions that cultivate the constitutional consciousness necessary for democratic citizenship.

This analysis, which connects the question of constitutional design to the broader questions of social and cultural transformation that Sofa and Khan have addressed from their different theoretical perspectives, reflects Razzaq's consistent insistence that political problems cannot be solved by institutional design alone. The design of institutions matters, but it matters in a context that either supports or undermines the genuine functioning of those institutions, and attending to that context is more fundamentally important than any specific institutional design.

23.5 The Rule of Law and Its Conditions

Razzaq's engagement with the concept of the rule of law, reconstructed from his teaching and from the accounts of his students, reflects his characteristic concern with the relationship between formal principles and the structural conditions necessary for those principles to be realized in practice. The rule of law, in its formal definition, requires that the exercise of political power be governed by general, publicly known, consistently applied, and equally enforced legal rules rather than by the arbitrary will of those who hold power. This formal conception of the rule of law is a genuine and important political value, but it is, in Razzaq's analysis, insufficient as an account of what the rule of law requires in the specific conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh.

The insufficiency lies in the relationship between formal legal equality and substantive social equality. The rule of law formally requires that all citizens be subject to the same legal rules and that those rules be applied equally regardless of the social position of the parties involved. But in conditions where the legal system is administered by professionals who are recruited primarily from a specific social class, where access to effective legal representation is highly unequal across income groups, where the practical capacity to invoke legal rights depends on social connections and economic resources, and where the political connections of defendants systematically affect the outcomes of legal proceedings, the formal equality of the rule of law coexists with a profound substantive inequality in the distribution of legal protection and legal risk.

Razzaq was acutely aware of this gap between formal legal equality and substantive legal inequality in the Bangladeshi context, and his analysis of it anticipates what has become one of the most important themes in contemporary critical legal theory and in the legal development literature: the recognition that formal rule of law reforms are insufficient to address the substantive legal inequalities that characterize highly unequal societies. The development of a genuinely effective rule of law in Bangladesh requires not merely institutional reforms in the formal sense but social and economic transformations that address the structural conditions of substantive legal inequality.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: SOFA AND THE CRISIS OF LEGAL CULTURE

When the Law Becomes an Instrument of Its Own Betrayal

24.1 The Cultural Foundation of Legal Legitimacy

Ahmed Sofa's engagement with legal and constitutional questions is characteristically approached through the lens of cultural analysis rather than through the technical vocabulary of legal scholarship. But this cultural approach is not a deficiency. It reflects a genuine insight that the legal and constitutional dimensions of political life cannot be adequately understood in isolation from the cultural conditions that determine whether legal institutions are experienced as legitimate, whether legal rules are genuinely internalized rather than merely formally complied with, and whether the normative commitments that legal systems embody are genuinely shared by the communities they govern.

The central insight of Sofa's approach to legal culture is that the legitimacy of legal institutions depends not primarily on their formal structure or their procedural correctness but on the quality of the cultural and moral commitments they embody and the degree to which those commitments resonate with the genuine values of the community. A legal system that enforces rules that are experienced by the community as alien impositions rather than genuine expressions of shared values will tend to be regarded as a mechanism of power rather than a system of justice, and will generate the kind of instrumental relationship with legality, compliance in conditions of enforcement, resistance when enforcement is absent, that is fundamentally destructive of genuine rule of law.

This analysis of the cultural foundations of legal legitimacy has direct implications for understanding the specific character of the legal crisis in Bangladesh that Sofa diagnosed across his intellectual career. The Bangladeshi legal system, he argued, had never fully achieved the kind of cultural legitimacy that genuine rule of law requires, because it had been imposed through colonial processes that made it an instrument of alien power rather than a genuine expression of Bengali cultural values, and the postcolonial state had failed to fundamentally transform this character even as it changed the identity of those who controlled the system.

24.2 The Servile Lawyer: Legal Professionalism and Political Dependency

Sofa's analysis of the legal profession in Bangladesh is an extension of his broader analysis of the intellectual class and its structural tendency toward political servility. The specific dynamics of legal professional culture reproduce, in his analysis, the general pattern of the servile intellectual but with the specific twist that the law provides a particularly powerful set of institutional resources for the legitimation of political power: the capacity to transform politically motivated persecution into the appearance of regular legal procedure, to convert arbitrary exercise of political authority into formally compliant administrative action, and to provide the appearance of due process to proceedings whose outcomes are predetermined by political calculation.

The legal profession's structural position in Bangladesh, like that of the intellectual class more broadly, is one of simultaneous dependence on and complicity with the structures of political power. Senior lawyers' careers are built in part through their relationships with political clients and political courts. Judicial appointments are made through processes that have historically given political loyalty more weight than legal competence. The bar associations that nominally govern the legal profession are themselves sites of political competition that reproduce the dynamics of the broader political system within the professional structure.

This structural analysis does not imply that all Bangladeshi lawyers are politically motivated or that genuine legal independence is impossible. Sofa was at pains to acknowledge the existence of genuinely independent and courageous legal practitioners whose work has represented genuine professional integrity in conditions that systematically punish it. But these individuals, in his analysis, have operated against the structural grain of their professional environment rather than with it, and their existence confirms rather than refutes his structural analysis: the fact that individual integrity is possible does not demonstrate that the structural conditions are favorable to it.

24.3 The Legal Violence of Colonial Inheritance

One of Sofa's most politically important insights about the legal system concerns what one might call the legal violence of colonial inheritance: the ways in which specific legal provisions, institutional practices, and professional cultures that were designed in the colonial period to serve colonial governance have persisted into the postcolonial legal system, continuing to produce their colonial effects even in the nominally independent state.

The specific legal instruments that Sofa analyzed in this context include the sedition laws, the official secrets act, and various public order provisions that were introduced by the British colonial government as instruments for suppressing political opposition to colonial rule and that were carried over wholesale into the legal systems of both Pakistan and Bangladesh without fundamental revision. These laws were designed to punish the expression of political views that the colonial government found threatening. In the postcolonial context, they served the same function, but now in the service of the postcolonial state's political interests rather than the colonial power's.

The continuing use of these colonial-era legal instruments in postcolonial Bangladesh represents, in Sofa's analysis, one of the clearest manifestations of the deeper phenomenon he called the failure of genuine decolonization: the tendency of the postcolonial state to inherit and reproduce the repressive mechanisms of colonial governance even as it discarded the colonial state's formal political identity. A state that uses colonial sedition laws to prosecute political dissidents has not genuinely achieved the decolonization of its legal system simply because the dissidents are now Bengali rather than British.

This analysis connects directly to the broader framework of Khan's jurisprudential theory and to the specific legal developments of 2024-2026 in Bangladesh: the post-uprising political transition has explicitly addressed the legacy of these repressive legal instruments as part of its constitutional reform agenda, and the degree to which that agenda has genuinely transformed rather than merely rebranded them is one of the central questions that the tradition's analytical framework demands be asked.

24.4 The Instrumentalization of Justice: Law as Political Weapon

The most devastating aspect of Sofa's analysis of the Bangladeshi legal system is his account of what one might call the systematic instrumentalization of justice: the process by which the forms and procedures of the legal system are deployed as political weapons by those who control the state rather than as mechanisms for the impartial administration of justice.

This instrumentalization operates through several interconnected mechanisms. The selective prosecution of political opponents, using provisions of the criminal law that are formally applicable to a much wider range of conduct, converts the criminal justice system into an instrument of political control while maintaining the formal appearance of legal regularity. The use of the civil courts to impose financial burdens on political opponents through frivolous litigation that the state's superior resources enable it to sustain indefinitely while individual defendants are financially ruined creates a mechanism of political suppression that operates without the visibility of criminal prosecution. The management of judicial appointments to ensure that key judicial positions are occupied by individuals who can be relied upon to produce favorable outcomes in politically sensitive cases corrupts the formal independence of the judiciary while maintaining its formal institutional structure.

Sofa identified these mechanisms with particular precision in the context of the Awami League governments of both the early independence period and the later Hasina years, but his analysis was not partisan: he applied the same analytical framework to the military governments'

instrumentalization of the legal system and to the BNP governments' use of legal mechanisms for political purposes. The instrumentalization of justice, in his analysis, is a structural characteristic of the Bangladeshi political system that persists across changes in the political identity of those who hold power, not a specific pathology of any particular party or government.

This structural analysis generates a specific prediction about the post-2024 political transition: even if the specific political actors who change as a result of the 2024 uprising are genuinely committed to legal reform and to a non-instrumental relationship with the justice system, the structural conditions that have generated the instrumentalization of justice will continue to operate and will create pressures toward the same dynamics under the new political arrangements. The test of whether the post-2024 transition represents a genuine transformation rather than merely a change of personnel is whether those structural conditions are actually addressed rather than merely the specific personnel changed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: KHAN'S JURISPRUDENTIAL PHILOSOPHY

Law, Power, and the Postcolonial Legal Imagination

25.1 The Lacanian-Marxist Approach to Law

Salimullah Khan's approach to legal and constitutional questions is, as in all his intellectual work, organized around the combination of Marxist political economy and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory that characterizes his broader intellectual framework. Applied to legal and constitutional questions, this combination generates a distinctive jurisprudential philosophy that is simultaneously more theoretically sophisticated and more politically radical than the approaches of either Razzaq or Sofa, while also being more systematically grounded in the specific structural conditions of Bangladeshi political and legal life.

The Marxist dimension of Khan's legal philosophy is grounded in the classical Marxist analysis of law as a superstructural institution that reflects and reproduces the material interests of the dominant class. In the Bangladeshi context, this means analyzing the legal system in terms of the specific class interests it serves and the specific mechanisms through which it serves them: the constitutional protection of property rights and their specific distribution, the contract law that governs commercial relations and the class interests it presupposes, the administrative law that governs the relationship between state agencies and citizens and the power imbalances it reflects, and the criminal law that defines and punishes crime in ways that systematically overrepresent the conduct of the poor while underrepresenting the conduct of the powerful.

But the Marxist analysis of law, in its simpler formulations, reduces legal institutions to the direct expressions of class interest in ways that fail to capture the genuine relative autonomy of the legal system and the specific mechanisms through which legal institutions shape and constrain political power even in conditions where those institutions are fundamentally class-biased. This is where Khan's Lacanian dimension provides an essential supplement to the Marxist framework.

From the Lacanian perspective, the legal system is not merely an instrumental mechanism for the reproduction of class power. It is also a symbolic order, a system of signifiers that organize the relationship of subjects to authority, to justice, and to each other in ways that operate at the level of desire and identification rather than merely at the level of material interest calculation. The law interpellates subjects as legal subjects, positioning them in specific relationships to legal authority and creating specific forms of legal consciousness through which those subjects understand their rights, their obligations, and their relationship to the justice system.

This symbolic dimension of the law has important political implications. Legal consciousness, the specific ways in which subjects understand their relationship to the legal system and their legal rights and obligations, is not simply a reflection of material interests. It is shaped by cultural and educational processes, by the specific legal discourses that circulate in a society, and by the specific experiences of legal institutions that subjects accumulate over their lives. The specific legal consciousness of Bengali Muslim subjects in Bangladesh has been shaped by the interaction of colonial legal imposition, Islamic normative traditions, Bengali cultural values, and the specific experiences of legal institutions in the postcolonial period, producing a complex and often internally contradictory relationship to legal authority that cannot be adequately analyzed in purely instrumental terms.

25.2 Constitutional Fetishism and Its Critique

One of Khan's most important contributions to Bangladeshi constitutional theory is his critique of what he calls constitutional fetishism: the tendency to treat constitutional documents as if they were the source of their own authority, as if the formal declaration of constitutional rights and principles were sufficient to generate the political conditions for the realization of those rights and principles.

Constitutional fetishism, in Khan's analysis, operates through a specific mechanism of political mystification: it converts the political question of how power is actually distributed and how it actually operates in a society into a formal legal question of whether the constitutional text provides the correct institutional prescriptions. By doing so, it tends to deflect attention from the structural conditions that determine whether constitutional provisions are actually effective, and to locate political agency in the formal constitutional framework rather than in the social and political forces that determine whether that framework is genuinely operative.

The specific form that constitutional fetishism has taken in Bangladesh is the repeated return to constitutional drafting and amendment as the primary political response to political crises. When the political system fails, the response is constitutional amendment. When the constitution is violated, the response is constitutional revision. When electoral processes are manipulated, the response is electoral law reform. These responses are not without value: formal institutional design does matter, and there is genuine content to the constitutional reform agenda of 2024-2025. But they systematically underestimate the degree to which the failure of constitutional institutions in Bangladesh is a product of structural conditions that formal constitutional change cannot by itself address.

This critique does not lead Khan to a dismissive attitude toward constitutional reform. His position is more nuanced: constitutional reform is necessary but not sufficient, and the degree to which it is necessary depends on the specific content of the reform, not merely the fact that reform has occurred. The July Charter of 2025, which consolidated over 80 reform proposals including 48 constitutional amendments, deserves serious analytical engagement precisely at the level of whether its specific provisions address the structural conditions that have generated constitutional failure in Bangladesh, or whether they represent a sophisticated form of constitutional fetishism in which the appearance of radical institutional redesign masks the continuity of the structural conditions that made those institutions fail.

25.3 The Concept of Constitutional Fantasy

Khan's Lacanian framework generates a concept that has particular importance for the analysis of Bangladeshi constitutional culture: the concept of constitutional fantasy, which parallels and complements his concept of the political fantasy of liberation that was analyzed in Part Three.

The constitutional fantasy in the Bangladeshi context is the set of unconscious fantasmatic scenarios through which political subjects organize their relationship to the constitutional order: the image of what the constitution is, what it promises, what it can do, and what is required for its promises to be fulfilled. In Bangladesh, the dominant constitutional fantasy has been organized around the founding moment of the 1972 constitution, the moment of constitutional origination in which the aspirations of the liberation movement were crystallized in the formal structure of a new constitutional order.

This founding constitutional fantasy functions politically in complex and often contradictory ways. On the one hand, it provides a normative standard: the 1972 constitution's four fundamental principles of nationalism, democracy, secularism, and socialism constitute a kind of constitutional ideal against which subsequent constitutional mutations can be measured and found wanting. In this sense, the constitutional fantasy has been a resource for constitutional critique, providing the normative foundation for the argument that each successive amendment has represented a degradation of the original constitutional vision.

On the other hand, the constitutional fantasy of 1972 is also a mechanism of political displacement: by locating constitutional authenticity in a founding document produced in a specific political context that no longer exists, it tends to generate a backward-looking constitutional politics that seeks the restoration of a vanished constitutional moment rather than the construction of constitutional arrangements adequate to present conditions. The political argument that the Fifth, Seventh, and Eighth Amendments must be reversed and the 1972 constitution restored has genuine content in terms of the specific provisions that should be reinstated, but it also tends to treat the 1972 constitution as if it were a constitutional ideal rather than an imperfect historical document produced in specific conditions that may themselves need to be transcended.

Khan's constitutional theory demands a more forward-looking approach: the question is not how to restore the 1972 constitutional settlement but how to construct constitutional arrangements that genuinely address the structural conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh in 2026 in ways that

the 1972 constitution, however admirable as a document of political philosophy, was not designed to address and in some respects was not capable of addressing.

25.4 Islamic Law and Constitutional Theory: Khan's Complex Position

Khan's constitutional theory includes an engagement with the relationship between Islamic normative tradition and constitutional design that is among the most sophisticated treatments of this question in the Bangladeshi intellectual context. His engagement draws on his broader analysis of Bengali Muslim identity and on his reading of Islamic jurisprudence through the lens of his Freudo-Lacanian framework.

The constitutional question of Islam in Bangladesh has been one of the most persistently contested aspects of constitutional development since independence. The 1972 constitution's secular provisions, which established a secular state but not a state hostile to religion, were progressively eroded by the constitutional amendments of the military period, culminating in the Eighth Amendment of 1988 which established Islam as the state religion. The July Charter of 2025 has proposed to reinstate the formula of "faith and trust in Allah" in the constitutional preamble while addressing the state religion question in a way that seeks to balance Islamic identity with the constitutional rights of religious minorities, a balance whose adequacy has been the subject of significant political controversy.

Khan's approach to this constitutional question is organized around his distinction between Islamic identity as a cultural and spiritual resource, which he regards as genuinely valuable and as central to the self-understanding of the majority of Bangladesh's citizens, and political Islam as an ideological program that seeks to organize constitutional and legal structures around Islamic normative prescriptions in ways that he regards as fundamentally incompatible with the democratic and egalitarian commitments that the liberation movement articulated.

The jurisprudential substance of this distinction concerns the relationship between constitutional provisions that acknowledge Islamic identity and constitutional provisions that establish Islamic law as binding legal authority. A constitution can acknowledge that the state exists within a predominantly Muslim society and that Islamic values are important to its citizens without establishing Islamic jurisprudence as the source of constitutional authority or Islamic normative principles as the standard for evaluating constitutional validity. The specific constitutional arrangements through which this distinction is maintained or violated are matters of jurisprudential substance, not merely symbolic politics.

Khan's reading of Islamic jurisprudence, informed by his engagement with the work of thinkers like Abdullahi Ahmed an-Naim, Khaled Abou El Fadl, and the tradition of Islamic constitutionalism that seeks to reconcile Islamic values with democratic constitutional principles, is that there is no intrinsic jurisprudential incompatibility between Islam and democratic constitutional governance. The incompatibility is between specific political readings of Islamic law, particularly those that establish a political and legal authority that claims to be immune from democratic accountability because of its divine sanction, and the democratic constitutional principle that all political and legal authority derives its legitimacy from popular consent and is accountable to the people it governs.

This jurisprudential analysis has direct implications for evaluating the constitutional provisions of the July Charter and their relationship to the demands of the post-2024 political moment. The question of whether the Charter's treatment of Islam in the constitutional order represents a genuine reconciliation of Islamic identity with democratic constitutional principles or a political compromise that papers over a genuine jurisprudential tension is one that the tradition's analytical framework is uniquely equipped to address.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: THE CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY OF BANGLADESH

A Structural Analysis of Failure, Survival, and the Possibility of Transformation

26.1 The Original Promise: The 1972 Constitution in Structural Perspective

The constitutional history of Bangladesh begins with a document of genuine political ambition whose fate has been one of the most instructive tragedies in postcolonial constitutional development. The 1972 constitution, drafted with remarkable speed in the immediate aftermath of independence by a constituent assembly operating under conditions of enormous political pressure and social devastation, was both a genuine achievement of political philosophy and a structurally fragile institutional framework.

Its achievements as a document of political philosophy have already been noted: the enshrining of the four fundamental principles of nationalism, democracy, secularism, and socialism, the enumeration of extensive fundamental rights including the right to life and personal liberty, freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of religion, and a range of economic and social rights, and the establishment of a parliamentary system with genuine mechanisms of governmental accountability to the legislature. These were aspirations of genuine substance, not merely rhetorical declarations.

The structural fragility of the 1972 constitution lay in the combination of a concentration of executive power that was insufficient to generate effective governance without being constrained by adequate accountability mechanisms, and a set of formal rights protections that lacked the institutional enforcement mechanisms necessary to make them practically effective. The constitution established a prime minister with enormous executive authority and a parliamentary system in which, given the overwhelming dominance of the Awami League in the 1973 elections, the parliamentary accountability mechanisms were practically inoperative. The combination created conditions in which the concentration of political authority in the Awami League government was constitutionally facilitated without being constitutionally constrained.

The Fourth Amendment of January 1975, which converted Bangladesh into a one-party state under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's leadership, was constitutionally possible because the 1972 constitution had not adequately protected against exactly this kind of constitutional amendment. The amendment passed through a parliament that was formally valid but substantively subordinate to the executive will of the prime minister, and there were no institutional mechanisms, no constitutional court, no genuinely independent judiciary, no effective civil

society mobilization, capable of preventing or reversing it. The 1972 constitution had included the formal mechanisms of parliamentary democracy without the substantive conditions that make parliamentary democracy resistant to authoritarian subversion.

26.2 The Military Amendments: Constitutionalizing Unconstitutionality

The Fifth Amendment to the Bangladesh Constitution, introduced by the Zia government through the Indemnity Ordinance of 1975 and subsequently ratified through a constitutional amendment in 1979, represents one of the most intellectually troubling episodes in the constitutional history of Bangladesh: the constitutional legitimization of unconstitutional conduct.

The substantive content of the Fifth Amendment was the insertion into the constitution of provisions that retrospectively validated the military coups of 1975 and their aftermath, immunized the coup leaders from legal accountability for their unconstitutional actions, and altered the fundamental character of the constitutional order by removing secular provisions and inserting references to absolute trust in and faith in the Almighty Allah into the preamble. The constitutional mutation was thus simultaneously retroactive, immunizing past unconstitutional conduct, and prospective, reshaping the constitutional framework in the direction of the military government's political agenda.

The jurisprudential problem raised by the Fifth Amendment is one of the deepest in the theory of constitutional law: the problem of constituent power. If the people, or their representatives, have the ultimate power to amend the constitution, then in principle any constitutional amendment, including an amendment that retrospectively validates unconstitutional conduct, is itself constitutional. But this formalist conclusion is deeply unsatisfying because it reduces constitutional legitimacy to the question of whether proper amendment procedures were followed rather than whether the amendment's substance is consistent with the constitutional order's fundamental values.

The tradition's analytical framework provides a more adequate account of this problem. Razzaq's structural analysis identifies the Fifth Amendment as an expression of the structural dynamic of the postcolonial state: a military government using the constitutional amendment process to generate the legal legitimacy that its origin through force could not provide. Khan's constitutional fantasy analysis identifies it as a specific manipulation of the constitutional symbolic order: by inserting its own founding moment into the constitutional text, the Zia government attempted to make its rule appear as a constitutional continuation rather than a constitutional rupture.

The constitutional consequences of the Fifth Amendment were profound and long-lasting. The retrospective validation of the 1975 coups and their aftermath established a constitutional precedent for the legitimization of military interventions that the structural logic of the permanent state could exploit. And the removal of secular constitutional provisions created a constitutional opening for the subsequent Islamization of the constitutional order under Ershad, with consequences for the relationship between state and religion in Bangladesh that have not yet been fully resolved even in the post-2024 reform process.

26.3 The Eighth Amendment: Religion, State, and Constitutional Identity

The Eighth Amendment of 1988, introduced under the military government of Hossain Muhammad Ershad, made Islam the state religion of Bangladesh. This constitutional change was not merely symbolic. It represented a fundamental alteration of the constitutional identity of Bangladesh, converting it from a secular state in which all religious communities were formally equal before the law into a state with an officially established religion, which in principle creates a different relationship between the state and the Muslim majority on the one hand and the Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, and other minority communities on the other.

The structural analysis of the three figures provides several different but complementary perspectives on this constitutional change. Razzaq's structural analysis would identify it as a case of the political instrumentalization of religious identity for state-building purposes: Ershad used the constitutional establishment of Islam to generate Islamic political legitimacy for his regime, which lacked democratic legitimacy, in ways that were not genuinely responsive to any popular demand for the constitutional establishment of religion.

Sofa's cultural analysis provides a more complex account. He would note that the Eighth Amendment exploited the genuine importance of Islamic identity to the Bengali Muslim population while simultaneously distorting it in politically convenient directions. The Bengali Muslim attachment to Islam is a genuine cultural and spiritual commitment, not merely a political identification. The constitutional establishment of Islam as state religion did not honor this genuine commitment but rather instrumentalized it, converting a genuine spiritual and cultural reality into a constitutional political resource for a military ruler.

Khan's structural analysis connects the Eighth Amendment to his broader account of the permanent state and its mechanisms of legitimation: the military government faced a fundamental legitimacy deficit that democratic elections could not resolve, because free elections would have removed it from power. Religious nationalism provided an alternative source of legitimacy that was less dependent on democratic consent and more dependent on the identification of the state with a transcendent religious community. The constitutional establishment of Islam was the formal constitutional expression of this political strategy.

The Eighth Amendment has never been constitutionally reversed. The July Charter of 2025 addressed the question of Islam's constitutional status but did so through a compromise formula that acknowledged Islamic identity without fully resolving the constitutional tension between state religion status and the equal rights of religious minorities. The jurisprudential adequacy of this compromise, and its relationship to the broader question of constitutional identity in post-2024 Bangladesh, is among the most contested aspects of the current constitutional moment.

26.4 The Fifteenth Amendment: Democracy Hollowed from Within

The Fifteenth Amendment of 2010, introduced by the Hasina government shortly after its return to power, is in some respects the most complex episode in Bangladeshi constitutional history because it combined genuine democratic restoration with structural democratic subversion in ways that are analytically difficult to disentangle.

The genuine democratic restoration dimension included the reintroduction of the principle of secularism into the constitutional preamble, the deletion of the Fifth and Seventh Amendments' retrospective validation of military coups, and the restoration of parliamentary democracy as the constitutional system of government after the quasi-presidential arrangements introduced by earlier amendments. These changes had genuine constitutional merit and represented an authentic attempt to restore aspects of the 1972 constitutional vision that the military amendments had destroyed.

The structural democratic subversion dimension included, most critically, the abolition of the caretaker government system that had been introduced by the Thirteenth Amendment of 1996 as a mechanism for ensuring electoral integrity. The caretaker government system, under which a neutral interim government oversaw elections to prevent incumbency advantage, had been imperfect in its operation but had represented one of the few institutional mechanisms in Bangladeshi constitutional history that genuinely addressed the structural problem of electoral manipulation by the incumbent government.

The Supreme Court's ruling that the caretaker government system was unconstitutional provided the legal cover for the Fifteenth Amendment's abolition of it. But the structural logic of the amendment was transparent to anyone applying the tradition's analytical framework: the party in power was removing an accountability mechanism that constrained its capacity to manipulate electoral outcomes. The constitutional argument against the caretaker system, while formally defensible, served the political interest of the Awami League government in a way that made its constitutional sincerity suspect.

The consequences of this aspect of the Fifteenth Amendment were precisely those that the structural analysis of the tradition predicted: the elections of 2014, 2018, and 2024 that followed the abolition of the caretaker system were progressively less competitive and less credible as expressions of genuine popular choice, culminating in the January 2024 election that was widely characterized as a predetermined result conducted in the absence of genuine opposition participation and that contributed directly to the political conditions that generated the 2024 uprising.

26.5 The Thirteenth Amendment and Its Resurrection: The Caretaker System as Constitutional Theory

The history of the caretaker government system in Bangladesh is a microcosm of the broader constitutional story and deserves extended analysis because it illustrates with particular clarity the relationship between constitutional design, structural political incentives, and the capacity for constitutional institutions to be created, preserved, and destroyed by the political forces they are supposed to constrain.

The caretaker government system emerged not from a top-down constitutional design process but from the bottom-up pressure of a mass political movement. The 1994-1996 political crisis, which saw the BNP government conduct by-elections under controversial conditions and the Awami League leading a sustained campaign of political resistance, produced the specific political conditions under which the Thirteenth Amendment was possible: both major political

parties saw, in different ways and for different reasons, the value of a constitutional mechanism that would constrain the capacity of the incumbent government to manipulate elections.

The political theory implicit in this process is important. The caretaker government system was a constitutional solution to a structural political problem: the structural problem of the incumbent government's capacity to exploit its control of the state apparatus for electoral advantage. Constitutional solutions to structural political problems tend to be unstable, because the structural political conditions that generated the problem continue to operate even after the constitutional solution is in place, generating political incentives to circumvent or eliminate the solution when it becomes inconvenient for those who hold power.

This is precisely what happened with the caretaker government system. The system constrained electoral manipulation sufficiently to generate more genuinely competitive elections in 1996, 2001, and 2008. But the constraint it imposed on incumbents created political incentives for the incumbent government to eliminate it when the opportunity arose. The Hasina government's use of the Supreme Court's constitutional ruling to justify abolishing the caretaker system through the Fifteenth Amendment was exactly the exercise of the political incentive that the structural analysis predicted.

The July Charter of 2025 reintroduced a version of the caretaker government mechanism. Proposals in the Charter address local governance autonomy, the delineation of presidential powers, and the formation of a constitutionally anchored caretaker system to manage future transitions. [IRI](#) The constitutional theory of the restored caretaker system needs to be more sophisticated than that of the 1996 system, precisely because the history of the Thirteenth Amendment has provided an object lesson in how such systems can be constitutionally vulnerable. The challenge for post-2024 constitutional design is to create a caretaker mechanism that is both constitutionally entrenched against the kind of Supreme Court challenge that was used to undermine the Thirteenth Amendment, and structurally adequate to the specific mechanisms of electoral manipulation that the experience of the 2014-2024 period has revealed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: THE JULY CHARTER OF 2025 AND ITS PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS

Revolution, Reform, and the Limits of Constitutional Negotiation

27.1 The Genesis of the Charter: From Mass Uprising to Negotiated Document

The July Charter of 2025 is the most ambitious constitutional reform document produced in Bangladeshi political history, and its analysis through the framework of the tradition requires engaging with both its genuine achievements and its structural limitations with the intellectual honesty that the tradition has always demanded.

Following Bangladesh's July-August 2024 mass uprising and the collapse of Sheikh Hasina's government, the interim administration under Professor Muhammad Yunus initiated an

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ambitious constitutional reform agenda. This process led to the July Charter of 2025, a politically negotiated document endorsed by 24 parties that consolidates over 80 reform proposals, nearly half of them constitutional. [ConstitutionNet](#)

The process through which the Charter was developed is itself philosophically significant. Following the establishment of eleven reform commissions in October 2024, which involved varying levels of public participation and consultation, the Interim Government ultimately established a National Consensus Commission in February 2025 to steer political negotiations and consolidate the reform agenda. [ConstitutionNet](#) The National Consensus Commission's year-long process of consultation and negotiation, involving thirty-three political parties through multiple rounds of structured dialogue, was an unprecedented exercise in participatory constitutional development in the Bangladeshi context.

The structural significance of this process cannot be overstated. Previous constitutional amendments in Bangladesh had been produced through the executive-dominated processes that the tradition's constitutional mutation thesis describes: an incumbent government deploying its parliamentary majority to push through constitutional changes that served its political interests. The Charter's development through a multi-party negotiation process led by a nominally non-partisan interim government represents a genuinely different constitutional genealogy, and this difference has genuine normative weight even if it also has genuine limitations.

The limitations of the process are significant and demand honest acknowledgment. The National Consensus Commission comprised eight representatives (all men) drawn from only six of the eleven reform commissions, with four reform commissions, notably the women's commission, excluded from its composition and terms of reference. [ConstitutionNet](#) This exclusion of the women's commission from the core constitutional negotiation process reflects exactly the kind of limitation that Khan's critique of the tradition's inadequate engagement with gender has identified: the political consensus process systematically underrepresented the perspectives and interests of half the population.

More fundamentally, the Awami League's exclusion from the constitutional negotiation process, whether voluntary or effectively compelled by the political conditions of the post-uprising period, raises genuine questions about the constitutional legitimacy of a process that claimed to speak for national consensus while explicitly excluding the party that had won the previous four general elections. The Charter's claim to represent the will of the people, however authentic the uprising that provided its political mandate, was structurally compromised by the absence of one of the major political forces in Bangladeshi life.

27.2 The Charter's Substantive Content: A Jurisprudential Assessment

The Charter contains 84 reform recommendations, including 48 constitutional amendments, addressing executive term limits, judicial independence, electoral governance, oversight institutions, and decentralization. [Journal of Democracy](#) Each of these areas of substantive reform demands jurisprudential analysis in terms of whether the specific provisions adopted address the structural conditions identified by the tradition's analytical framework.

The provision for executive term limits, which the Charter proposes to limit the prime minister's tenure to two terms, is among the most structurally significant of the constitutional changes, because it addresses directly one of the most characteristic features of the constitutional mutation dynamic: the tendency toward the indefinite accumulation of personal political power by incumbent leaders. Key aspects include establishment of ten-year term limits for the prime minister. [Wikipedia](#) The structural analysis of the tradition predicts that this provision, if genuinely implemented and constitutionally entrenched, would address one of the primary mechanisms through which the postcolonial state's tendency toward authoritarian consolidation operates: the capacity of a long-serving incumbent to progressively reshape state institutions to serve personal political interests.

But the structural analysis also identifies a potential limitation: term limits constrain individual leaders but do not by themselves address the dynastic and patronage dynamics that the tradition has identified as characteristic of Bangladeshi political parties. A party led by a term-limited leader can continue to exercise the same structural dynamics of political clientelism and institutional capture through a successor who is connected to the same political family or patron network. The provision of term limits, while genuinely valuable, is thus necessary but insufficient as a structural response to the constitutional mutation dynamic.

The judicial independence provisions of the Charter, which connect directly to the developments in judicial reform that have occurred since August 2024, deserve particular attention because they represent the most sustained attempt in Bangladeshi constitutional history to address the structural conditions of judicial dependence that the tradition has consistently identified as a fundamental obstacle to genuine rule of law.

The Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance in 2025 and the inauguration of the separate Supreme Court Secretariat on 11 December 2025 constitute a landmark institutional reform. For the first time, the apex court has been vested with comprehensive administrative authority over its own affairs through an institutional structure independent of executive ministries. [The Daily Star](#) This reform, which addresses what the most persistent structural vulnerabilities of the judicial system: dual administration, by consolidating administrative control within the judiciary, removes residual executive leverage over judicial careers and court management [The Business Standard](#), represents exactly the kind of institutional reform that the tradition's structural analysis of judicial dependence would identify as essential.

The structural analysis also notes, however, that administrative independence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for substantive judicial independence. Without timely parliamentary ratification, full financial autonomy, and transparent staffing and accountability measures, the reform could remain fragile and reversible. [The Daily Star](#) The trajectory of these reforms into the period of the new BNP government elected in February 2026, including the new parliament's initial decision regarding which of the interim government's ordinances to retain or allow to lapse, will provide one of the most important real-time tests of whether the post-2024 constitutional transformation is genuine rather than merely transitional.

27.3 The Referendum Mechanism: Constitutional Theory and Democratic Legitimacy

The decision to subject the July Charter to a constitutional referendum, held simultaneously with the February 2026 parliamentary elections, raises profound questions of constitutional theory that connect directly to the tradition's framework for analyzing constitutional legitimacy.

Bangladesh is thus not simply voting on reforms. It is testing whether its democratic refounding can proceed at transitional speed while still generating broad political ownership. What begins as a dual ballot of electoral choice and constitutional authorization converges into a single legitimacy judgement. [Journal of Democracy](#)

This analysis, from the Journal of Democracy, reflects in some respects the same constitutional problematic that Khan's concept of constitutional fantasy addresses. The referendum mechanism attempts to generate democratic legitimacy for the constitutional reform package by submitting it to popular approval. But the specific form of the referendum, as a bundled package of 84 proposals submitted to a single yes-or-no vote, raises genuine questions about whether the democratic consent expressed through the referendum is genuine or merely formal.

While the Bangladesh Nationalist Party secured a two-thirds supermajority and 61% of voters endorsed the reform package, the referendum's ambiguously framed questions left unclear which of the July Charter's proposals were actually approved and what binding force they carry. [ConstitutionNet](#)

The constitutional theory problem here is one that the tradition's framework enables precise analysis of. Khan's critique of constitutional fetishism is directly relevant: the referendum mechanism risks generating the appearance of popular constitutional authority while obscuring the genuine complexity of the constitutional questions at issue. A voter who endorses the July Charter package with a single yes vote is not necessarily endorsing each of the 84 reform proposals it contains, and the constitutional legitimacy that the yes vote is supposed to provide is therefore ambiguous in its scope and content.

The structural analysis of the tradition would also note that the conditions under which the referendum was conducted, in the context of a polarized political environment in which the Awami League, which had been banned from participation, could not campaign against the package, and in which the political organizations most closely associated with the 2024 uprising were actively advocating for a yes vote, were not the conditions of genuine popular deliberation on constitutional choices. The 61% yes vote reflected genuine popular endorsement of the general direction of constitutional reform, but the specific constitutional provisions of the Charter were not subjected to the kind of deliberate popular engagement that genuine constitutional consent requires.

27.4 The BNP's Two-Thirds Victory and Its Constitutional Implications

On 12 February 2026, voters in Bangladesh cast their ballots concurrently in the 13th parliamentary elections and a constitutional referendum, both held under the Interim Government of Bangladesh. The Bangladesh National Party secured a decisive two-thirds supermajority, returning to power for the first time in 17 years. [ConstitutionNet](#)

The constitutional implications of the BNP's two-thirds supermajority are among the most structurally significant aspects of the post-2024 political transition, and they require analysis through the tradition's framework with particular care.

A two-thirds parliamentary supermajority, in the Bangladesh constitutional framework, provides the capacity to amend the constitution without requiring any cross-party consensus. The BNP's possession of this supermajority means that the constitutional reform agenda, in whatever form it takes in the new parliament, is subject to the same structural dynamic that the tradition has consistently identified as characteristic of the constitutional mutation thesis: a political party in power with the constitutional capacity to amend the constitution has the political incentive to use that capacity in ways that serve its own political interests, and the structural conditions of Bangladeshi political life create systematic pressure toward exactly this use.

The irony, which the tradition's structural analysis makes visible with unusual clarity, is that the constitutional reform process that was intended to address the structural conditions of authoritarian consolidation has produced electoral conditions in which the immediate post-reform political landscape reproduces one of the most dangerous of those structural conditions: a single party with unconstrained constitutional amendment power.

The structural analysis of the tradition does not predict what specific uses the BNP will make of its constitutional supermajority. It predicts that the structural incentives toward using constitutional amendment power for partisan political advantage will operate, and that the degree to which the BNP government resists those incentives will depend on factors that are not predetermined by the structural conditions alone, including the specific political commitments of the new leadership, the degree of organizational independence of Bangladeshi civil society, the capacity of the political opposition, particularly the NCP and its allies, to exercise effective extra-parliamentary accountability, and the strength of the international democratic norms and oversight mechanisms that the post-2024 reform process has engaged with.

The absence of the Awami League's participation in the political dialogue and the national election compounds the legitimacy tension: will a referendum, no matter how sophisticated, be able to compensate for the absence of a broader and inclusive political consensus? [The Diplomat](#) This question remains acutely relevant in the post-election period. The BNP government that has emerged from the February 2026 elections governs a society in which approximately one-third of the electorate has traditionally supported the Awami League, and that has been excluded from the electoral process. The constitutional legitimacy of the new government, whatever its formal electoral validity, is subject to the same kind of substantive challenge that the tradition's theory of constitutional legitimacy identifies as fundamentally important.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE AS POLITICAL THEORY

The Long Battle for an Independent Judiciary in Bangladesh

28.1 The Historical Architecture of Judicial Dependence

The struggle for judicial independence in Bangladesh is one of the most sustained and instructive institutional struggles in the political history of the country, and its analysis through the tradition's framework reveals the specific mechanisms through which the structural dependence of the judiciary on executive power has been maintained across political transitions and the specific conditions under which genuine independence has been achieved or approximated.

The colonial judiciary that Bangladesh inherited was not designed for independence. It was designed for administration: for the management of the legal relations between colonial subjects in ways that maintained order and facilitated economic extraction. The judges of the colonial system were civil servants of the colonial state whose primary loyalty ran to their administrative superiors rather than to an abstract conception of legal justice. The jurisprudential culture they embodied was one of administrative regularity rather than constitutional scrutiny: courts applied the rules that the colonial state had established, they did not interrogate whether those rules were themselves consistent with higher principles of justice or constitutional legitimacy.

The postcolonial legal system inherited both the formal structure and the substantive culture of this colonial judiciary. The formal structure, with its hierarchical organization of district courts, High Court, and Appellate Division, was retained largely intact. The substantive culture of administrative regularity over constitutional scrutiny was also retained, reinforced by the political conditions of the postcolonial state in which governments that controlled judicial appointments also controlled the legal context within which judicial decisions were made.

The key institutional mechanism of judicial dependence was what constitutional scholars call the dual administration problem: for most of Bangladesh's post-independence history, the administration of the subordinate judiciary, including the appointments, promotions, transfers, and disciplinary proceedings of district court judges, was controlled by the Ministry of Law rather than by the Supreme Court. This arrangement created a direct mechanism through which the executive branch could exercise influence over the careers of lower court judges in ways that systematically rewarded political reliability and punished judicial independence.

The formal separation of the judiciary in 2007 laid the structural foundation, while the inauguration of the separate Supreme Court Secretariat in 2025 represents a decisive step toward completing that constitutional project. [The Business Standard](#) The 2007 separation, which followed the Masdar Hossain judgment of 1999 that the Supreme Court had ordered be implemented, transferred control of the subordinate judiciary to the Supreme Court, addressing the most direct mechanism of executive control. But, as independence is not a static achievement. In a developing society marked by socio-economic inequality, political polarisation, and institutional constraints, judicial independence remains a continuing constitutional practice rather than a finished reality. [The Business Standard](#)

28.2 The Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance: A Structural Analysis

The Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance of 2025 is the most significant judicial reform measure in Bangladesh since the Masdar Hossain implementation of 2007, and it deserves detailed analysis as the concrete expression of the structural reform agenda that the tradition's jurisprudential framework demands.

The November 2025 promulgation of the Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance, establishing, for the first time, an autonomous administrative arm for the judiciary, has been widely hailed as a historic breakthrough. Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed called it the beginning of "a new era," aligning long-standing constitutional ideals with institutional reality. [The Daily Star](#)

The structural significance of the Secretariat lies in what it addresses and what it leaves unresolved. What it addresses is the administrative mechanism of executive influence over the judiciary: by creating an independent administrative structure through which the Supreme Court manages its own affairs, including the appointments, transfers, and disciplinary proceedings of subordinate court judges, the Secretariat removes the Ministry of Law's direct administrative leverage over judicial careers.

A separate judicial secretariat would secure genuine administrative and financial autonomy, professionalise court management, and enhance accountability through transparent reporting and benchmarking. [Oxford Human Rights Hub](#)

What it leaves unresolved, and what the tradition's structural analysis insists must be addressed, is the deeper cultural and social conditions of judicial dependence: the jurisprudential culture that inclines judges toward political conformity, the social networks that connect judicial figures to political elites in ways that create informal pressures on judicial decision-making, and the financial conditions that make judicial careers dependent on political favor in ways that formal administrative independence does not fully address.

The structural analysis also notes a specifically political vulnerability that the Secretariat faces. The special parliamentary committee, reviewing ordinances issued by the interim government, recommended that the four ordinances related to the apex court, including the Supreme Court Judges Appointment Ordinance, 2025 and the Supreme Court Secretariat Ordinance, 2025, be repealed or allowed to expire. [The Daily Star](#) The new BNP parliament's initial treatment of these ordinances provides a direct test of whether the constitutional reform agenda survives the transition from interim government to elected government. If the judicial independence reforms are allowed to lapse by a parliament that possesses the two-thirds supermajority necessary to reshape the constitutional order as it chooses, the structural analysis of the tradition predicts the likely trajectory of the judicial reform process under the new government.

28.3 The High Court's Role: Constitutional Adjudication in a Politicized Environment

The High Court Division of the Supreme Court has historically been both a site of genuine constitutional adjudication and a site of political contestation in which the boundaries between legal and political judgment are frequently and consequentially blurred. The tradition's analytical framework provides tools for distinguishing between these two dimensions, and for evaluating specific judicial decisions in terms of whether they represent genuine constitutional analysis or politically inflected legal management.

The most significant constitutional decisions of the Bangladeshi High Court have been those in which the court has engaged with the fundamental questions of constitutional legitimacy that the tradition's framework identifies as central: the validity of constitutional amendments, the scope

of fundamental rights protections, the limits of executive authority, and the constitutional status of specific political arrangements. The court's record on these questions has been mixed: genuine moments of constitutional courage coexist with troubling episodes of political deference.

The judicial courage cases include the *Anwar Hossain Chowdhury v. Bangladesh* decision of 1989, which held that the Eighth Amendment's alteration of the High Court's jurisdiction was unconstitutional, and the *Masdar Hossain* judgment of 1999, which ordered the separation of the subordinate judiciary from the executive. Both decisions represented the court exercising genuine constitutional scrutiny against the interests of the incumbent government, and both faced significant political resistance.

The political deference cases are more numerous and more troubling: the validation of the Fifth Amendment's retrospective legitimization of military coups, the Supreme Court's ruling that the caretaker government system was unconstitutional, which provided the legal cover for the Fifteenth Amendment's elimination of that system, and various decisions during the Hasina period in which the court's application of constitutional provisions against political opponents of the government was more vigorous and consistent than its application of the same provisions against the government's own conduct.

The Supreme Court of Bangladesh, with support from UNDP and the Embassy of Sweden, held a regional seminar in Rajshahi to advance judicial reforms. Chief Justice Dr. Syed Refaat Ahmed emphasized the need for independence, efficiency, and accountability in the judiciary, noting 'Judicial independence ensures that judges make decisions based on the law and their conscience, free from external pressures.' [United Nations Development Programme](#)

The structural analysis of the tradition situates this aspiration within the conditions that would need to be transformed for it to be realized. The Chief Justice's articulation of the ideal of judicial independence is genuine and important, but the tradition's framework insists that institutional reform must be accompanied by cultural transformation: the development of a jurisprudential culture within the judiciary that genuinely internalizes the principle of independence and provides professional and social support for its exercise.

28.4 The Appointment Crisis and the New Framework

On 21 January 2025, the interim government published the Supreme Court Judge Appointment Ordinance, 2025 in the Gazette, establishing an independent council led by the Chief Justice to appoint judges to higher courts. Previously, the executive held significant control over judicial appointments, which led to widespread criticism for producing a politicized judiciary. [International IDEA](#)

The creation of an independent judicial appointments council addresses one of the most persistent structural mechanisms of judicial dependence in Bangladesh: the direct control by the executive of who becomes a judge of the superior courts. The political significance of this control is difficult to overstate: the composition of the judiciary at the appellate level determines the constitutional doctrine that will govern the most significant political and legal disputes in the

country for decades, and the capacity to shape that composition is therefore one of the most powerful political levers available to any government.

The structural analysis of the tradition identifies several critical conditions that determine whether the new appointments framework will achieve genuine independence in practice. First, the composition and operation of the appointments council must be genuinely insulated from political pressure, which requires both formal structural protections and the development of a professional culture within the council that prioritizes merit-based assessment over political consideration. Second, the criteria for judicial appointments must be sufficiently specific and transparent to constrain the discretion of the appointments process and to enable accountability when those criteria are not followed. Third, the decision-making of the appointments council must be sufficiently transparent to enable civil society and the legal profession to scrutinize appointment decisions and to identify when merit-based criteria have been subordinated to political or personal considerations.

None of these conditions is automatically satisfied by the formal creation of an appointments council. Each requires sustained institutional development and political commitment that extends beyond the specific reform moment and persists through changes in political leadership. The tradition's structural analysis is cautiously skeptical about the capacity of formal institutional reforms to sustain themselves against the political incentives that will operate on future governments, and this skepticism is not unfounded given the specific history of judicial reform in Bangladesh that the preceding sections have documented.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: THE 2026 ELECTIONS AND CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM

Democratic Transition and the Test of Institutional Sincerity

29.1 The Political Architecture of the February 2026 Election

The February 12, 2026 election in Bangladesh represents the most structurally complex electoral event in the country's history, not primarily because of its technical complexity, but because it compressed into a single day two distinct exercises of democratic authority that constitutional theory normally regards as requiring different conditions and different kinds of democratic deliberation.

On 12 February 2026, voters in Bangladesh cast their ballots concurrently in the 13th parliamentary elections and a constitutional referendum, both held under the Interim Government of Bangladesh. The Bangladesh National Party secured a decisive two-thirds supermajority, returning to power for the first time in 17 years. [Wikipedia](#)

The tradition's analytical framework generates a complex assessment of this electoral event that does not reduce to simple celebration or simple critique. On the positive side, the fact that elections were held at all, that they were organized by an interim government that had genuine

independence from the major political forces competing in them, that they attracted international observation from credible bodies including the European Union, and that they produced a result that the major competing parties accepted as broadly reflecting the genuine choice of the electorate, represents a significant achievement relative to the trajectory of Bangladeshi electoral history since 2014.

The Election Commission invited five organizations to observe the election, including the United Nations, the European Union, International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute, and the Commonwealth. [Wikipedia](#) The EU's decision to accept the invitation and conduct an observation mission, following its more critical engagement with the 2014 and 2018 elections, provides an external validation of the election's basic integrity that is not without structural significance.

On the negative side, the exclusion of the Awami League from the electoral process raises fundamental questions about the democratic character of the result that go beyond any assessment of the election's technical organization. The absence of the Awami League's participation in the political dialogue and the national election compounds the legitimacy tension: will a referendum, no matter how sophisticated, be able to compensate for the absence of a broader and inclusive political consensus? [The Diplomat](#)

The structural analysis of the tradition addresses this question through the framework of constitutional legitimacy: the genuine legitimacy of a political and constitutional order requires the inclusive participation of the major political forces in the society it governs, including those forces that have lost power through whatever mechanisms of political change have operated. A constitution and a government that emerge from a process from which a major political force has been excluded face a continuing legitimacy challenge that formal electoral success cannot fully resolve.

29.2 The BNP's Constitutional Power and the Structural Risk

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party's two-thirds parliamentary supermajority, secured in the February 2026 elections, is the most politically consequential single outcome of the post-2024 transition from the perspective of constitutional theory. It creates conditions in which the structural dynamics that the tradition's constitutional mutation thesis has consistently identified as generative of authoritarian consolidation are not merely present as background structural pressures but are constitutionally enabled in the most direct possible sense.

The tradition's structural analysis does not predict that the BNP government will inevitably use its constitutional supermajority to undermine the reform agenda of the transitional period. Historical determinism of that kind is not consistent with the nuanced structural analysis that the tradition embodies. What the structural analysis predicts is that the political incentives toward using constitutional amendment power for partisan political advantage will operate, and that resisting those incentives requires the kinds of countervailing forces, civil society pressure, international accountability, opposition political mobilization, and internal party democratic culture, that may or may not be sufficiently developed in the specific conditions of post-2026 Bangladesh.

The first test of the BNP government's constitutional commitments is already visible in the early reporting about the new parliament's treatment of the interim government's ordinances. The special parliamentary committee, reviewing ordinances issued by the interim government, recommended that 20 of them lapse or expire, including those aimed at ensuring judicial independence, curbing enforced disappearances, and strengthening the anti-corruption and human rights commissions. [The Daily Star](#)

This development is, from the perspective of the tradition's analytical framework, a deeply troubling confirmation of the structural prediction. The specific ordinances that the parliamentary committee recommended for lapse, those addressing judicial independence, enforced disappearances, and anti-corruption mechanisms, are precisely the ones that the structural analysis identifies as most critical for genuine democratic consolidation. Their abandonment, if it occurs, would represent not merely a specific policy decision but a structural statement about the BNP government's actual commitment to the reform agenda it has formally endorsed.

Political analysts and former parliamentary officials warned that repealing ordinances related to apex court reforms may derail efforts to grant the judiciary administrative and financial autonomy. Without these measures, the executive branch would continue to control judicial appointments, transfers, and promotions, undermining the separation of powers. [The Daily Star](#)

The tradition's analytical framework endorses this warning while embedding it in the broader structural analysis: the abandonment of judicial independence reforms is not merely a specific policy error but an expression of the structural logic of the postcolonial state asserting itself through the new government's exercise of its constitutional power.

29.3 The Awami League Ban and Its Constitutional Implications

In April 2025, after a massive demonstration by the National Citizen Party, citizens and other political parties like the Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh, the government banned the Awami League as an organization under the anti-terrorism act. [Wikipedia](#)

The banning of the Awami League is constitutionally among the most significant and most troubling acts of the Yunus interim government. Its significance lies not merely in its specific political consequences, the exclusion of a major political force from the February 2026 elections, but in what it reveals about the constitutional conception of democracy that the post-2024 political transition has embodied.

The tradition's analytical framework generates an assessment of the Awami League ban that is both analytically clear and politically uncomfortable. The ban is analytically clear in its constitutional character: the use of anti-terrorism legislation to ban a political party, however genuine the specific legal basis for the ban in the Awami League's conduct during the July 2024 uprising, is constitutionally problematic because it conflates the legal accountability of individual party members for specific criminal acts with the political suppression of a party that represents a significant portion of the Bangladeshi electorate.

The tradition's commitment to the rule of law requires the distinction between individual criminal accountability and collective political suppression. Sheikh Hasina and specific members of her government may face legitimate criminal accountability for specific acts of repression during the uprising, including the killing of protesters, and on 17 November 2025, the International Crimes Tribunal ruled that Sheikh Hasina and her co-defendants were guilty of war crimes and sentenced her along with former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death. [Wikipedia](#) Whether this judgment was reached through processes that satisfy the standards of genuine judicial independence that the reform agenda has articulated is a question that demands independent assessment.

But the criminal accountability of specific individuals does not justify the organizational ban of the party they led: the Awami League represents the political aspirations of a significant portion of the Bangladeshi electorate, and those aspirations cannot be constitutionally disenfranchised simply because the party's most recent leadership committed serious abuses of power. The constitutional principle of political pluralism requires that political parties be permitted to exist and to compete in elections even when their recent leadership has behaved in ways that the current political authority finds objectionable.

This analysis does not amount to a defense of the Awami League's conduct under the Hasina government. It is an application of the principle of constitutional consistency: if the tradition's framework criticizes the Hasina government for using legal mechanisms against political opponents in ways that converted law into a political weapon, then consistency requires applying the same critique to the use of legal mechanisms to suppress political participation by the Awami League in the post-2024 transition.

Sofa's analysis of the servile intellectual who criticizes the opponent's use of power while excusing the same conduct by the ally is directly relevant here, and the tradition demands that this analysis be applied without partisan exception, including in the emotionally and politically charged conditions of post-2024 Bangladesh.

29.4 The Hasina Conviction: Law, Justice, and Political Context

On 17 November 2025, the International Crimes Tribunal ruled that Sheikh Hasina and her co-defendants were guilty of war crimes and sentenced her along with former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death. [Wikipedia](#)

The conviction of Sheikh Hasina by the International Crimes Tribunal raises profound questions of legal philosophy that connect to the deepest themes of the tradition's jurisprudential framework. These questions must be addressed honestly, because the tradition's commitment to intellectual integrity demands that the same standards of legal analysis be applied to legal proceedings against political opponents of the current establishment as to those against political opponents of previous establishments.

The questions of legal philosophy raised by the conviction concern the relationship between legal process and political context. The International Crimes Tribunal was a mechanism for accountability for the specific crimes of the 2024 uprising's repression, crimes that were real and

serious. The killing of more than eight hundred, possibly as many as fourteen hundred protesters, including students, workers, and children, represents a genuine crime against humanity for which genuine accountability is required by both the specific demands of the victims and the general requirements of justice.

But genuine accountability requires proceedings that satisfy the standards of fair trial, judicial independence, and due process that the rule of law demands, regardless of the gravity of the crimes alleged. The political context in which the Tribunal operated, the complete exclusion of the Awami League from political participation, the banning of the party whose leadership the Tribunal was trying, and the political pressure generated by the mass demonstrations that had demanded accountability, creates conditions in which the independence of the Tribunal's proceedings is subject to legitimate scrutiny.

The tradition's jurisprudential framework does not suggest that the verdict is necessarily wrong in its factual findings or its legal conclusions. It insists that the verdict must be evaluated against the standards of fair trial and judicial independence that genuine rule of law requires, rather than merely against the political desirability of accountability for the specific crimes alleged. A proceeding that reaches a correct factual and legal conclusion through a process that does not satisfy fair trial standards is not, from the jurisprudential perspective of the tradition, a genuine exercise of justice, however politically satisfying its result may be.

This is a demanding jurisprudential position in the specific political context of post-2024 Bangladesh, and one that will generate political controversy precisely because it demands applying the rule of law's standards even to proceedings that address genuinely serious crimes against genuinely real victims. But the tradition has always insisted that the most important tests of the rule of law are not the cases where its application is politically comfortable, but the cases where it is politically inconvenient. The Hasina conviction is one such case.

CHAPTER THIRTY: LAW, JUSTICE, AND THE QUESTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Transitional Justice Theory and Its Application to Bangladesh

30.1 The Theory of Transitional Justice: What the Tradition Contributes

The specific situation of Bangladesh in the post-2024 period places it squarely within the field of what legal and political theorists call transitional justice: the set of judicial, quasi-judicial, and non-judicial mechanisms through which societies attempt to address the legacy of serious human rights violations, authoritarian governance, and political violence as they transition from authoritarian to democratic governance.

Transitional justice theory has developed significantly over the past three decades, drawing on the experiences of societies ranging from South Africa to Chile, from Rwanda to Bosnia, from Germany to South Korea. The major mechanisms of transitional justice that this literature has identified and analyzed include criminal prosecutions of perpetrators, truth commissions that

document violations without necessarily pursuing criminal accountability, reparations programs for victims, institutional reform to prevent recurrence, and various combinations of these mechanisms.

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan does not engage directly with the academic literature on transitional justice, which was largely developed after the primary intellectual formations of all three figures. But the tradition's jurisprudential framework generates a distinctive set of analytical principles for evaluating transitional justice mechanisms that is both consistent with the best insights of the transitional justice literature and inflected by the specific historical and cultural conditions of Bangladesh.

The most important of these principles is what one might call the structural accountability principle: the recognition that transitional justice mechanisms that focus exclusively on individual criminal accountability for specific past violations, while leaving untouched the structural conditions that generated those violations, achieve justice for specific victims without addressing the conditions that will generate future violations. This principle is consistent with the most sophisticated recent theoretical developments in transitional justice, including what scholars call the fourth wave of transitional justice that emphasizes structural and systemic reform alongside individual accountability.

Applied to Bangladesh in 2025-2026, this principle generates a specific assessment: the accountability proceedings against Sheikh Hasina and her government for the killings of 2024, while genuinely important for the victims and for the principle of individual accountability, do not by themselves address the structural conditions of the permanent state, the accumulation of unchecked executive power, the political instrumentalization of the security forces, and the systematic erosion of institutional accountability, that made the 2024 repression possible.

30.2 The 1971 War Crimes Legacy and Its Unresolved Dimensions

The question of accountability for the crimes of 1971, the violence committed by the Pakistani military and its local collaborators during the Liberation War, has been one of the most persistently contested aspects of Bangladeshi political and legal life since independence. The International Crimes Tribunal established by the Hasina government in 2010 represented the most sustained attempt to provide criminal accountability for those crimes, and its proceedings generated significant controversy both domestically and internationally.

Salimullah Khan's position on the Tribunal, consistent with his broader position on the politics of liberation war memory, was one of genuine support for the principle of accountability while maintaining critical analysis of the specific ways in which the accountability process was politically managed by the Awami League government. He supported the war crimes trials as an expression of the democratic demand for accountability for genuine atrocities, while simultaneously analyzing the ways in which the Awami League government used the trial process as a political resource, deploying it against political opponents and managing its public presentation in ways that served partisan rather than purely justice-oriented purposes.

This position was, predictably, attacked from multiple directions: by those who argued that any qualified support for the trials was tantamount to support for impunity for the perpetrators, and by those who argued that any support at all for the trials was evidence of political alignment with the Awami League. Khan's consistent response was to maintain the analytical distinction between the principle of accountability and the specific political management of the accountability process, insisting that both could be evaluated on their own terms without either being reduced to the other.

The broader jurisprudential question raised by the 1971 war crimes accountability process concerns the conditions under which criminal accountability for political violence can be genuinely judicial rather than politically managed. The tradition's jurisprudential framework insists that genuine judicial proceedings require genuine judicial independence, including independence from the political pressures and considerations of the government that has established the tribunal. This standard is demanding, perhaps impossibly so in conditions where the political stakes of the accountability process are as high as they were in Bangladesh, but it is the standard that a genuine commitment to the rule of law requires.

30.3 The Truth and Healing Commission: A Restorative Justice Approach

Key aspects of the July Charter include the establishment of a Truth and Healing Commission. [Wikipedia](#) This provision, which draws on the experience of truth and reconciliation commissions in other transitional societies, represents a significant departure from the purely criminal accountability approach that had characterized the Hasina government's transitional justice strategy and that has been reproduced in the post-2024 proceedings against the Awami League leadership.

The tradition's jurisprudential framework engages with restorative justice approaches with both appreciation and analytical skepticism. The appreciation lies in the recognition that criminal accountability, while necessary for the most serious violations, is insufficient as a comprehensive response to the legacy of political violence and authoritarian governance. Truth commissions that document the full range of violations, that create a public record of what happened and why, and that provide space for victims to have their experiences recognized and acknowledged, serve justice functions that criminal proceedings cannot adequately perform.

The analytical skepticism concerns the conditions under which truth commission processes can be genuine rather than merely performative. A truth commission that documents violations selectively, that focuses on the crimes of the previous regime while ignoring or minimizing the violations of allied forces, that treats acknowledgment as a substitute for accountability rather than a complement to it, and that fails to address the structural conditions that generated the violations it documents, is not a genuine exercise of restorative justice but a political performance that serves the interests of the current establishment.

The specific design and mandate of any Truth and Healing Commission established in Bangladesh will therefore be the crucial determinant of its jurisprudential character. The tradition's framework demands that such a commission have a genuinely inclusive mandate, covering not merely the specific violations of the Hasina period but the full range of political

violence and authoritarian governance that Bangladesh has experienced across its political history, including the violations of the military governments, the political violence of the BNP-Jamaat alliance periods, and the institutional degradation that has characterized the functioning of the permanent state across multiple political dispensations.

30.4 The Enforced Disappearances Question: A Specific Test of Institutional Reform

The question of enforced disappearances, which became one of the most prominent human rights issues in Bangladesh during the later years of the Hasina government, provides a specific and concrete test for the institutional reform agenda of the post-2024 period.

Civil society continues to document arbitrary arrests, press freedom violations and attacks on religious minorities. The interim government has established multiple reform commissions and scheduled a general election for April 2026, but ongoing human rights abuses, along with institutional fragility and political exclusion, indicate the fragility of the transition. [CIVICUS LENS](#)

The enforced disappearances issue is particularly significant for the tradition's analytical framework because it connects the specific human rights violation of disappearances to the structural conditions of the permanent state that the tradition has consistently analyzed: the security apparatus's capacity to operate outside legal accountability, the judicial system's inadequacy as a mechanism for providing remedies to victims of state violence, and the political class's tendency to treat security force conduct as a matter of political management rather than legal accountability.

The Inquiry Commission on Enforced Disappearances, established by the interim government, produced findings that documented hundreds of cases of disappearances during the Hasina period and identified specific institutional mechanisms through which the security apparatus had operated without legal accountability. The commission's findings provide both a specific historical record and a structural diagnosis that connects to the tradition's broader analysis of the permanent state and its mechanisms of political control.

The structural question that the tradition's framework demands be answered is whether the specific reforms proposed in response to these findings, including amendments to the security forces' legal framework, enhanced oversight mechanisms, and criminal accountability for specific perpetrators, address the structural conditions that enabled the disappearances or merely provide accountability for specific past violations while leaving those structural conditions largely intact.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE: HUMAN RIGHTS THEORY IN THE BANGLADESHI CONTEXT

From Formal Rights to Structural Conditions

31.1 The Constitutional Architecture of Human Rights

The fundamental rights provisions of the Bangladesh Constitution have never been fully effective as mechanisms for the protection of human rights in practice, and the tradition's jurisprudential framework provides an analytical account of why. The constitutional enumeration of rights, however extensive and however philosophically sophisticated, is insufficient for the practical protection of those rights in conditions where the institutional mechanisms for rights enforcement are structurally dependent on the political authority whose conduct those mechanisms are supposed to constrain.

The rights enumerated in the Bangladesh Constitution cover a wide range of civil, political, and social protections. The right to life and personal liberty, the freedom of thought and conscience, the freedom of expression, the right to equality before the law, the freedom of assembly and association, and the protection against arbitrary arrest and detention are all formally guaranteed. The economic and social rights included in the constitution, particularly the rights to education, healthcare, and protection from economic exploitation, go significantly further than many comparable constitutional documents.

But the practical protection of these rights has been consistently inadequate, and the tradition's structural analysis explains why. The rights are formally justiciable, meaning that they can in principle be enforced through the courts. But the capacity to invoke judicial protection of constitutional rights depends on access to legal representation, knowledge of legal processes, the willingness and ability to sustain litigation against a politically powerful adversary, and the independence of the judiciary from the political pressures that might influence its decisions in rights cases where the government's conduct is directly implicated. None of these conditions has been consistently present in Bangladesh, and their absence systematically disadvantages exactly the most vulnerable members of the population, whose need for rights protection is greatest and whose capacity to access it is lowest.

The tradition's human rights theory, synthesizing the insights of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, demands a conception of human rights that goes beyond the formal constitutional enumeration to address the structural conditions of rights enjoyment. This is what the academic literature on human rights has increasingly recognized as the distinction between the right to and the right as: the formal constitutional right to expression, to assembly, to equality, must be distinguished from the effective right as a practical capacity to exercise these freedoms, and the latter requires not merely constitutional text but the social, economic, and institutional conditions that enable genuine enjoyment.

31.2 The Rights of Religious Minorities: The Most Persistent Constitutional Failure

The rights of religious and ethnic minorities in Bangladesh represent one of the most persistent and most serious failures of the constitutional rights framework, and one that the tradition's analytical framework identifies as connected to the deepest structural conditions of the Bangladeshi political system.

The Hindu minority, which constituted approximately one-quarter of the population at independence and has declined through successive waves of emigration driven by periodic communal violence and structural economic and political discrimination to approximately nine percent of the current population, represents the most historically significant and most numerically large of Bangladesh's religious minorities. The Christian and Buddhist minorities, along with the various indigenous ethnic communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and elsewhere, face their own specific patterns of discrimination and vulnerability.

The post-2024 political transition has not provided unambiguous reassurance about the future of minority rights in Bangladesh. Following communal violence after Hasina's resignation, Yunus threatened to resign if the violence continued and vowed to crack down on conspirators of the attacks. [CIVICUS LENS](#) The occurrence of communal violence in the immediate aftermath of the political transition reflects the structural vulnerability of minority communities during periods of political instability, and the interim government's response, while prompt in its rhetoric, has been subject to criticism about its effectiveness in practice.

The National Consensus Commission comprised representatives drawn from only six of the eleven reform commissions, with four reform commissions, notably the women's commission, excluded from its composition. [ConstitutionNet](#) The exclusion of minority perspectives from the core constitutional negotiation process, parallel to the exclusion of the women's commission, reflects the structural tendency of political negotiation processes to privilege the most politically powerful voices at the expense of those whose political organization is weaker and whose numerical representation is smaller.

The tradition's analytical framework demands that the rights of minorities be addressed not merely through formal constitutional provisions, which Bangladesh has had in various forms since 1972, but through the structural conditions that determine whether those provisions are practically effective. This requires addressing the economic conditions that generate minority vulnerability to exploitation and displacement, the political conditions that enable political mobilization of majority communal sentiment against minority interests, and the judicial conditions that determine whether minority rights can be practically enforced when violated.

31.3 Women's Rights and Constitutional Theory

In May 2025, a Women's Affairs Reform Commission set by the government proposed granting equal rights to women regarding property inheritance, against which Islamists organised massive demonstrations. [Wikipedia](#)

The controversy generated by the Women's Affairs Reform Commission's proposals provides one of the most vivid illustrations of the structural tensions within the post-2024 constitutional reform process, and it connects directly to the tradition's analytical framework in several important ways.

The substantive question of women's property inheritance rights is one with deep roots in both Islamic jurisprudence and in the specific cultural and economic conditions of Bangladeshi family life. Islamic inheritance law, as traditionally interpreted, provides women with inheritance shares

that are half those of men in comparable relationships. The Women's Affairs Reform Commission's proposal to move toward gender-equal inheritance rights, drawing on reinterpretations of Islamic jurisprudence that argue for gender equality within an Islamic normative framework, provoked organized Islamist opposition on the grounds that it violated Islamic legal principles.

Khan's jurisprudential framework provides the most sophisticated analytical framework for this controversy. His analysis of the relationship between Islamic normative tradition and constitutional design, informed by his reading of contemporary Islamic jurisprudence and by his Lacanian-Marxist analysis of the social functions of Islamic normative traditions, would engage with this controversy at multiple levels simultaneously.

At the jurisprudential level, Khan's framework would note that the question of whether Islamic inheritance law requires specific gendered ratios is itself a contested jurisprudential question within the Islamic tradition. There are serious contemporary Islamic jurisprudential scholars who argue that the Quranic provisions on inheritance should be understood in their specific historical context and that the underlying principle of the Quran's inheritance provisions, protection of women's economic security, can be better realized in contemporary conditions through gender-equal arrangements than through the strict application of historically specific ratios.

At the structural level, Khan's Marxist analysis would note that the opposition to gender-equal inheritance rights is not merely a jurisprudential position but an expression of specific material interests: the maintenance of gendered inheritance arrangements preserves specific patterns of property accumulation and family economic organization that serve the interests of those with property to accumulate and distribute.

At the psycho-analytical level, Khan's Lacanian framework would analyze the intensity of the Islamist response to the women's commission's proposals in terms of the specific fantasmatic structure of Islamic normative identity and the threat that the disruption of that structure represents at the level of psychic investment rather than merely rational interest calculation.

This multi-level analysis is characteristic of the tradition at its most sophisticated, and it demonstrates both the analytical power of the tradition's framework and the specific relevance of that framework to the constitutional questions that Bangladesh confronts in 2026.

31.4 The Right to Education as Constitutional Requirement

Khan's sustained advocacy for Bengali-medium education, which has been one of the most consistent themes of his intellectual and political work, is not merely a cultural or linguistic preference. It is a constitutional argument grounded in his theory of substantive human rights: the right to education, properly understood, requires not merely the formal availability of schooling but the substantive conditions under which genuine educational development is possible.

The constitutional argument proceeds from the premise that education conducted primarily in a language that students do not natively speak, and that they can only imperfectly acquire, is

systematically unequal as compared with education conducted in the native language of the students. This systemic inequality, which the English-medium educational system imposes on the vast majority of Bangladeshi students whose native language is Bengali, constitutes a structural violation of the constitutional right to education that is not captured by purely formal conceptions of educational equality.

The political significance of this constitutional argument extends beyond the specific question of educational medium. It connects to the broader question of the relationship between colonial inheritance and constitutional rights: a constitutional framework that formally guarantees equal rights while operating in institutional conditions that systematically reproduce colonial hierarchies is not genuinely committed to the equality it formally endorses. The reform of educational language policy is, on this analysis, a constitutional requirement, not merely a cultural preference.

The post-2024 reform process has included proposals for educational reform that address some of these concerns, but the structural conditions that generate the preference for English-medium education among those who can access it, specifically the fact that English proficiency continues to be a major determinant of access to the most prestigious and remunerative positions in the economy and in public life, have not been addressed. Genuinely addressing those conditions would require not merely changing the medium of instruction but transforming the economic and social conditions that determine the value of different linguistic capacities in the Bangladeshi labor market and social structure.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO: THE FUTURE OF CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY IN BANGLADESH

What the Tradition Demands and What the Evidence Suggests

32.1 The Structural Conditions for Constitutional Success

The post-2024 political transition in Bangladesh has created conditions that are, from the perspective of the tradition's analytical framework, simultaneously more genuinely favorable to constitutional democratic development than any previous political moment since 1972 and more structurally complex and uncertain than the dominant narrative of the transition has generally acknowledged.

The favorable conditions include the genuine popular mandate expressed in the July 2024 uprising, which articulated democratic aspirations of unusual clarity and breadth. They include the genuine international engagement with Bangladesh's constitutional reform process, including the EU observation mission and the National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute pre-election assessment missions. They include the genuine, if imperfect, institutional reforms of the Yunus interim government period, particularly the judicial independence reforms and the electoral process reforms. And they include the genuine political reorganization of Bangladesh's political landscape, with the emergence of the National Citizen Party and related

formations as a new political force that is not straightforwardly captured by the existing dynamics of competitive oligarchy.

The unfavorable structural conditions include the BNP's constitutional supermajority, which creates the conditions for constitutional mutation without requiring cross-party consensus. They include the exclusion of the Awami League from the political process, which creates a legitimacy deficit that could generate political instability. They include the specific early signs of the new parliament's willingness to allow judicial independence reforms to lapse, which suggests that the structural dynamics of the permanent state are already reasserting themselves under the new political leadership. And they include the persistent structural conditions of economic inequality, educational hierarchy, and patron-client political mobilization that the tradition has consistently identified as the deep structural obstacles to genuine constitutional democracy.

The tradition's framework does not generate simple optimism or pessimism about the constitutional future of Bangladesh. It generates analytical sobriety: an insistence on assessing the evidence honestly, on maintaining the structural analytical perspective that neither celebrates specific political actors nor demonizes them, and on applying the same standards of constitutional evaluation consistently regardless of the political identity of those being evaluated.

32.2 The July Charter: An Assessment Under the Tradition's Standard

Applying the tradition's constitutional analytical standards to the July Charter of 2025, the most comprehensive constitutional reform document produced in Bangladesh's political history, generates an assessment that is both appreciative of genuine achievements and analytically rigorous about genuine limitations.

The genuine achievements of the Charter include the comprehensive engagement with constitutional reform across multiple dimensions of the political and legal framework, the multi-party negotiation process through which it was developed, the provision of term limits for the prime minister, the judicial independence provisions, the restoration of the caretaker government mechanism, and the attention to decentralization and local governance that addresses one of the persistent structural features of Bangladesh's over-centralized political system.

The process led to the July Charter of 2025, a politically negotiated document endorsed by 24 parties that consolidates over 80 reform proposals, nearly half of them constitutional, yet marked by significant dissent. [ConstitutionNet](#)

The analytical limitations of the Charter include its exclusion of the Awami League from the negotiation process, its inadequate engagement with the gender dimension of constitutional reform, its bundling of 84 proposals into a single referendum question that prevented genuine deliberative engagement with specific constitutional provisions, the ambiguity of the constitutional authority through which the interim government conducted the referendum, and the question of whether the specific constitutional provisions of the Charter genuinely address the structural conditions of constitutional failure or represent a sophisticated form of constitutional fetishism.

The constitutional tensions at play illustrate a more fundamental problem of political legitimacy. To the extent that the Parliament's mandate is predetermined and its members chosen through an election in which the principal opposition was not a participant, ratification risks becoming a plebiscitary ritual rather than a democratic foundation. [The Diplomat](#)

This critique from within the constitutional scholar community reflects the same analytical concern that the tradition's framework generates: the genuineness of constitutional reform is determined not merely by the content of the reforms but by the conditions under which they are adopted and the degree to which they enjoy the genuine democratic endorsement that constitutional legitimacy requires.

32.3 The Intellectual Tradition in the Constitutional Moment: What Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan Demand

The three figures whose intellectual tradition has been the subject of this textbook have each, from their distinctive analytical perspectives, contributed to the resources that are most urgently needed in the constitutional moment that Bangladesh currently occupies.

Razzaq's structural analysis of the relationship between constitutional form and political substance demands that the current constitutional reform process be evaluated not merely on its formal merits but on its structural implications: whether the specific reforms adopted address the structural conditions that have generated constitutional failure in Bangladesh, or whether they represent the latest episode in the pattern of constitutional mutation that his framework has consistently identified.

Sofa's cultural analysis of the relationship between intellectual honesty and political courage demands that the intellectual class in Bangladesh refuse the temptation of partisan celebration of the post-2024 transition and maintain the critical independence that genuine intellectual work requires. The danger that Sofa's analysis consistently identified, the conversion of genuine critical intelligence into political partisanship, is particularly acute in a political moment where the emotional energy of a genuine popular uprising creates strong pressure toward uncritical enthusiasm for the political forces associated with that uprising.

Khan's Lacanian-Marxist framework demands that the analysis of the constitutional moment go beneath the surface of institutional reform to the structural and psychic conditions that determine whether that reform can be sustained. The constitutional fantasy of transformation, the unconscious scenario in which the July uprising and the constitutional reform process have definitively broken with the structural dynamics of the postcolonial state, is potentially as politically disabling as any of the previous constitutional fantasies that Khan has analyzed: it mystifies the degree to which those structural dynamics continue to operate by producing the appearance of fundamental change at the level of formal institutions.

The tradition's deepest demand is for intellectual honesty in the face of political pressure: the commitment to following the analytical implications of genuine thinking wherever they lead, regardless of whether those implications are welcome to the political forces that currently hold

power, and regardless of whether they confirm or challenge the dominant narrative of the present political moment.

In the specific conditions of Bangladesh in 2026, with a new government elected with a constitutional supermajority, with an incomplete and ambiguous constitutional reform agenda, with the excluded Awami League creating a permanent legitimacy challenge, with early signs of the permanent state's structural dynamics reasserting themselves through the new government's treatment of judicial independence reforms, and with the economic and social structural conditions of democratic failure largely unaddressed by the political transition that has occurred, this intellectual honesty is both urgently necessary and institutionally difficult to maintain. It is what the tradition demands, and it is what the Bangladesh of 2026 most urgently needs.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE: THE JURISPRUDENCE OF LIBERATION

1971 as Legal Event and Its Constitutional Implications for 2026

33.1 Legal Personhood and Revolutionary Legitimacy

The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 raises a fundamental question of jurisprudence that the tradition engages with but that has not been exhausted by existing analysis: the question of how a new state acquires its legal legitimacy and what the character of that legitimacy determines about its subsequent constitutional development.

The standard international law doctrine of state formation provides a primarily formal account: Bangladesh acquired legal personality as a state when it met the standard criteria of statehood, a defined territory, a permanent population, an effective government, and the capacity to enter into international relations, and this legal personality was confirmed through the diplomatic recognition extended to Bangladesh by other states following its independence in December 1971.

But this formal account is, from the tradition's jurisprudential perspective, inadequate because it says nothing about the specific normative character of the Bangladeshi state's founding legitimacy: the specific moral and political values that the liberation struggle articulated and that the new state claimed to embody. The tradition's jurisprudential framework insists that the specific moral content of the founding legitimacy matters for understanding the constitutional obligations of the subsequent state, because a state that was founded on specific promises of equality, human dignity, and social justice has specific constitutional obligations that derive from those founding commitments.

Khan's analysis of the three fundamental principles of the liberation war as constitutional obligations, equality, human dignity, and social justice, is the most systematic articulation of this jurisprudential position. It holds that these three principles constitute a kind of unwritten constitutional law that underlies and takes precedence over the specific provisions of the written

constitution, and that the written constitution must be interpreted and applied in ways consistent with these founding principles.

This jurisprudential position has direct implications for evaluating the constitutional reform agenda of 2025-2026: the ultimate test of whether the reform agenda is constitutionally adequate is not whether it reproduces or restores specific provisions of the 1972 constitution but whether it creates the constitutional conditions for the realization of the founding principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice that the liberation struggle expressed.

33.2 The Constitutional Law of Accountability: 1971 and Its Unfinished Business

The question of accountability for the crimes of 1971 remains constitutionally unresolved in Bangladesh, and its resolution, or continued non-resolution, has implications for the constitutional culture of the country that go beyond the specific historical question of justice for past wrongs.

The crimes of 1971, specifically the systematic violence perpetrated by the Pakistani military and its local collaborators against the civilian population of East Pakistan during the Liberation War, were among the most serious crimes of the twentieth century: crimes against humanity that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands, possibly millions, of people and the displacement and violation of millions more. The demand for accountability for these crimes has been a persistent theme in Bangladeshi political culture since independence, and the International Crimes Tribunal established under the Hasina government represented the most sustained attempt to provide that accountability.

The jurisprudential legacy of the 1971 accountability process is complex. On the positive side, the fact that trials were conducted at all, that specific individuals were prosecuted for specific crimes, and that the judicial proceedings generated a public record of specific violations, represents a genuine contribution to the historical memory and the political culture of accountability that the tradition has consistently argued Bangladesh requires. On the negative side, the specific proceedings of the Tribunal were subject to sustained criticism from international human rights organizations and legal scholars for procedural shortcomings that raised genuine questions about whether the convictions obtained satisfied the standards of fair trial that international human rights law requires.

The tradition's jurisprudential framework holds both of these dimensions in simultaneous analytical view, refusing to collapse the complexity of the accountability question into either a simple defense of the Tribunal's proceedings or a simple condemnation of them. The genuine need for accountability and the genuine procedural concerns are both part of the constitutional truth about what Bangladesh requires and what it has or has not achieved, and intellectual honesty demands that both be acknowledged.

33.3 The Makings of a Genuine Constitutional Culture

The tradition's jurisprudential analysis converges, across all three of its major figures and across all the specific constitutional questions it has engaged with, on a single fundamental insight: the

development of genuine constitutional democracy in Bangladesh requires not merely constitutional reform but the development of a constitutional culture, a set of shared values, norms, and habits of political behavior that genuinely internalizes the commitments that constitutional governance embodies.

Constitutional culture, in this sense, is not the same as constitutional knowledge: knowing what the constitution provides is not the same as genuinely valuing constitutional institutions and being willing to defend them when they are under political pressure. Constitutional culture is the disposition, cultivated through education, political experience, and the modeling of institutional behavior by political leaders and legal professionals, to treat constitutional institutions as genuinely authoritative rather than as resources to be deployed when convenient and circumvented when inconvenient.

The development of genuine constitutional culture in Bangladesh has been systematically impeded by the specific conditions that the tradition's framework has consistently analyzed: the educational system's reproduction of colonial hierarchies, the political system's patron-client mobilization, the legal profession's structural dependence on political patronage, the media's susceptibility to political pressure, and the intellectual class's tendency toward servility. Addressing these conditions requires the long-term cultural transformation that the tradition has consistently argued is the deepest challenge facing Bangladesh.

The constitutional reform agenda of 2025-2026 addresses some of the institutional prerequisites for constitutional culture development: judicial independence reforms provide the structural conditions for a legal profession that values and models constitutional integrity; electoral reforms provide the structural conditions for political competition that is organized around competing programs rather than competing patronage networks; media freedom reforms provide the structural conditions for an information environment that enables constitutional accountability. But the development of the actual culture, the genuine internalization of constitutional values at the individual and social level, is the work of generations rather than of a single political transition.

It is precisely in relation to this long-term cultural project that the intellectual tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan makes its most fundamental contribution. Their work, taken together, represents the most sustained and sophisticated attempt in Bangladeshi intellectual history to model the kind of constitutional culture that genuine democratic governance requires: the culture of honest inquiry, of structural analysis, of intellectual courage, of political independence, and of genuine commitment to the values of equality, human dignity, and social justice that the tradition has consistently articulated and consistently enacted.

SUMMARY OF PART FOUR

Part Four has conducted the most detailed jurisprudential analysis yet of the constitutional and legal dimensions of the intellectual tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, situating that analysis in

relation to the extraordinary developments in Bangladeshi constitutional life between 2024 and 2026.

Beginning with the constitutional theories implicit in each figure's broader intellectual framework, the analysis traced those theories through the specific constitutional history of Bangladesh: from the original promise of the 1972 constitution through the pattern of constitutional mutation documented in the Fifth, Seventh, Eighth, and Fifteenth Amendments, to the constitutional reform agenda of the post-2024 transition, the July Charter of 2025, the February 2026 elections and constitutional referendum, and the early constitutional developments under the new BNP government.

The central analytical finding of Part Four is one that the tradition's framework consistently generates: the constitutional reform agenda of 2024-2026 represents genuine and significant progress relative to the constitutional trajectory that preceded it, while also exhibiting the structural limitations that the tradition's analysis of the postcolonial state consistently predicts. The BNP's two-thirds supermajority creates constitutional conditions that reproduce the structural risks of the constitutional mutation dynamic even as the Charter's specific provisions attempt to address those risks. The judicial independence reforms represent genuine structural progress while remaining politically vulnerable to reversal. The exclusion of the Awami League from the political process creates a legitimacy deficit that formal electoral success cannot fully resolve. And the structural conditions of economic inequality, educational hierarchy, and patron-client political mobilization that the tradition has consistently identified as the deep structural obstacles to constitutional democracy remain largely unaddressed by the political transition that has occurred.

The tradition's most important jurisprudential demand, in the current constitutional moment, is for the kind of analytical honesty that it has always modeled: the willingness to apply the same constitutional standards consistently regardless of the political identity of those being evaluated, to acknowledge the structural limitations of the current reform agenda while honoring its genuine achievements, and to maintain the long-term perspective on constitutional development that prevents both uncritical enthusiasm for current political actors and paralyzing pessimism about the structural conditions they are navigating.

Part Five will address the cultural dimension of the tradition's analytical framework in systematic detail, examining the tradition's engagement with literature, language, the politics of cultural identity, and the relationship between intellectual culture and political development. Part Six will address Islamic thought and its relationship to the tradition's political and cultural analysis. Parts Seven through Ten will address comparative dimensions, ethics and moral philosophy, the full range of controversies and conspiracy theories, and the tradition's future respectively.

End of Part Four

PART FIVE: CULTURE, LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND THE POLITICS OF BENGALI IDENTITY

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR: THE CULTURAL TURN AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Culture as the Ground of Politics in the Tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan

34.1 Why Culture Is Not Separate from Politics

One of the most persistent and damaging errors in the study of intellectual history is the tendency to treat culture as a domain separate from politics, as if literature were a refuge from the hard world of power, as if language were a neutral medium for the transmission of ideas that existed independently of the linguistic form in which they were expressed, and as if the arts were ornamental additions to a social life whose real substance was located elsewhere, in economics, in government, in the exercise of state authority. This error is not accidental. It serves specific interests. When culture is treated as apolitical, when literature is read as purely aesthetic experience, when language is regarded as a transparent vehicle rather than a politically charged medium, the political dimensions of cultural production become invisible, and the mechanisms by which culture reproduces or challenges existing power arrangements are concealed from critical scrutiny.

The intellectual tradition of Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan has, from its origins, refused this separation. All three figures have understood culture, in the broadest sense that includes literature, language, artistic practice, intellectual life, and the organization of educational institutions, as the ground on which politics is ultimately played out. This is not the crude reductionism that treats culture as a simple reflection of economic interests or class position. It is a far more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between cultural production and political life, one that recognizes the relative autonomy of cultural forms while insisting on their constitutive relationship with the social and political conditions within which they arise.

The theoretical foundations for this understanding were laid in different ways by each of the three figures. Razzaq drew on a tradition of British political sociology, particularly the work of Harold Laski and the institutional analysis associated with the London School of Economics, which understood political culture as a crucial mediating factor between formal constitutional arrangements and the actual exercise of power. Sofa drew on a combination of Bengali literary tradition, the legacy of progressive anti-colonial writing, and a penetrating sociological analysis that owed something to the Marxist tradition without being reducible to any orthodox Marxist formula. Khan has drawn most explicitly on the theoretical resources of Western critical theory, particularly the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework and the Marxist political economy tradition, to develop the most systematic theoretical account in the tradition of why culture matters for politics and how the relationship between them should be analyzed.

What unites these different theoretical foundations is a shared insistence that the question of who controls the means of cultural production, who has access to literacy and education, whose language is valorized and whose is denigrated, whose stories are told and whose are suppressed, and whose cultural forms are held up as models of excellence and whose are dismissed as primitive or inadequate, is a political question of the first order. It is a question about power, about the reproduction of hierarchy, about the conditions under which genuine democratic participation is possible, and about the kind of human beings that a particular social order tends to produce and tends to prevent from being produced.

In the specific context of Bangladesh, these questions have had a particular intensity and urgency that derives from the specific history of colonial domination, linguistic politics, and postcolonial state formation that the tradition has analyzed at length. The Bengali language question, the relationship between Bengali and Muslim identity, the contested legacy of Rabindranath Tagore for the cultural life of Bangladesh, the place of Kazi Nazrul Islam in a tradition that is simultaneously Bengali and Muslim, the politics of literary canon formation, the sociology of the intellectual class and its relationship to power, and the educational institutions through which cultural hierarchies are reproduced and challenged, are all questions that the tradition has addressed with unusual depth and rigor. It is to the detailed examination of these questions that Part Five is devoted.

34.2 The Three Axes of Cultural Analysis

The tradition's cultural analysis can be usefully organized around three intersecting axes, each of which generates its own set of questions and its own characteristic analytical approaches.

The first axis is the axis of language. The Bengali language is not merely the medium through which the tradition speaks; it is one of the primary objects of the tradition's political analysis. The history of Bengali as a language that was suppressed, defended, celebrated, and instrumentalized in the specific conditions of colonial Bengal, undivided Bengal, East Pakistan, and Bangladesh provides a continuous thread running through the intellectual work of all three figures. The Language Movement of 1952, in which young Bangladeshis died defending the right to use their mother tongue, is for this tradition not merely a historical event but a permanent reference point for thinking about the relationship between language, power, dignity, and democratic politics.

The second axis is the axis of literature. All three figures have engaged extensively with Bengali literature, both as literary critics and, in the case of Sofa, as major literary practitioners in their own right. Their literary engagement is not the disinterested aesthetic appreciation of the professional literary critic whose primary concern is formal excellence and whose political commitments, if any, remain separate from his critical practice. It is a politically engaged literary criticism that understands texts as social documents, as interventions in ongoing debates about Bengali identity and Bangladeshi society, and as resources for or obstacles to the genuine cultural development that the tradition consistently demands.

The third axis is the axis of cultural identity. The question of what Bengali Muslim identity is, where it comes from, what its relationship is to both Bengali Hindu identity and to the broader

Muslim world, and what it means for the possibilities of cultural and political life in Bangladesh, is the most difficult and the most contested question in the tradition's cultural analysis. It is the question that generated Sofa's most celebrated and most controversial work. It is the question that underlies Razzaq's sociological analysis of the formation of Muslim political consciousness in Bengal. And it is the question that Khan's theoretical framework approaches through the resources of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist political economy, arguing that the specific psychic and social formations of Bengali Muslim identity are the result of historical processes that can be analyzed and understood, and that this understanding is a precondition for genuine political and cultural liberation.

34.3 The Intellectual As Cultural Producer: A Distinctive Sociology

Before examining the specific cultural analyses offered by each of the three figures, it is important to attend to a question that all three have explicitly and repeatedly engaged with: the question of what the intellectual is, what function the intellectual serves in society, and what the specific conditions of intellectual production in Bangladesh determine about the character and quality of the intellectual work that is actually produced.

This is, in one sense, a sociological question. It asks about the social position of the intellectual, the institutional conditions within which intellectual work is produced and disseminated, the relationship between the intellectual class and the political and economic elites whose interests the intellectual may serve or challenge, and the dynamics by which some forms of intellectual work are rewarded and others are marginalized or suppressed.

But it is also a philosophical and ethical question. It asks about what intellectual integrity requires, what the relationship between genuine thinking and political commitment should be, whether the pursuit of truth and the pursuit of justice are compatible or potentially conflicting, and what it means for an intellectual to be genuinely independent in a social context that exerts constant pressure toward conformity and political alignment.

The tradition's answer to this question is developed most explicitly in Sofa's 1972 work *Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas*, which translates approximately as *A New Mode of Intellectualism*, and which represents the most important and the most controversial statement in the tradition about the sociology and the ethics of the intellectual class in Bangladesh. Sofa's analysis, which will be examined in detail later in this Part, argued with uncomfortable directness that Bangladeshi intellectuals were, as a class, characterized by opportunism, political servility, and a systematic failure to exercise the critical independence that genuine intellectual work requires. This diagnosis was not made in the spirit of contempt but in the spirit of what Sofa understood as genuine concern for the possibility of a cultural and intellectual life adequate to the demands of a newly independent nation that needed honest thinking more urgently than it needed comfortable reassurance.

The tradition's sociology of the intellectual has been developed further by Khan, who has applied Lacanian theoretical resources to the question of why the intellectual class in postcolonial societies tends toward the forms of conformism and political servility that Sofa diagnosed. The Lacanian framework, with its account of the subject's constitutive dependence on the approval of

the symbolic Other, provides a theoretical vocabulary for explaining the specific psychic mechanisms through which intellectual independence is surrendered and political alignment is achieved without the individual intellectuals involved necessarily being consciously aware of the processes by which their thinking is being shaped by the desire for recognition and approval from those who hold cultural and institutional authority.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE: AHMED SOFA'S LITERARY UNIVERSE

Fiction as Philosophy, Narrative as Social Diagnosis, and the Art of Discomfort

35.1 A Writer Who Refused Comfort

Ahmed Sofa wrote fiction in the way that he did everything else: with a combination of fearlessness, intellectual rigor, emotional intensity, and a complete refusal to offer his readers the consolations that popular fiction typically provides. His novels and short stories do not resolve the tensions they explore. They do not offer redemptive narratives or hopeful endings. They do not present their readers with characters whose virtues are rewarded and whose vices are punished in the satisfying pattern of moral fable. Instead, they present the actual texture of Bengali Muslim life in Bangladesh with a fidelity to psychological truth and social complexity that is, even decades after their composition, bracing and sometimes deeply uncomfortable.

Sofa began writing in the 1960s, a decade of intense political ferment in East Pakistan that was also a decade of remarkable cultural productivity in Bengali literary life. His first published novel, *Surya Tumi Saathi* (translated roughly as *Sun, You Are My Companion*), appeared in 1967 and established immediately his characteristic concern with the interior life of characters who are alienated, questioning, and unable to reconcile themselves to the social conditions in which they find themselves. The novel's protagonist is not a heroic figure but a troubled one: a young man whose intellectual sensitivity has made him acutely conscious of the contradictions of his social world but has not provided him with the resources to navigate those contradictions successfully. This pattern, of the sensitive consciousness confronted with a social reality that cannot accommodate it without demanding its transformation into something less genuine, runs through Sofa's fictional work from the beginning to the end.

The critical and philosophical depth of Sofa's fiction was recognized by his contemporaries, including Abdur Razzaq, who stated that Sofa's works constitute a treasure trove for Bengali literature and that they create their own worlds where one can easily forget oneself. This is high praise from a man who was not given to hyperbole and who had read more widely in world literature than almost any other Bangladeshi intellectual of his generation. Razzaq's praise locates Sofa's achievement precisely in the quality of imaginative world-creation that distinguishes genuinely literary fiction from mere storytelling: the creation of a fictional world with sufficient density, coherence, and internal life to sustain extended imaginative habitation.

35.2 Omkar: Liberation as Philosophical Problem

Sofa's 1975 novel *Omkar*, the title of which references the sacred syllable of Hindu philosophical tradition, is considered by many critics, including Abul Fazal and subsequently Salimullah Khan, to be the finest literary expression of the Bangladesh Liberation War. This judgment requires careful unpacking, because the novel is not, in any straightforward sense, a celebration of liberation. It is a searching philosophical meditation on what liberation means, what it costs, what it fails to achieve, and what unresolved tensions it leaves in its wake.

The novel is set in the period immediately surrounding the liberation war and its aftermath, and it traces the experiences of characters who participated in the liberation struggle and must now confront the reality of the independent Bangladesh that the struggle has produced. What Sofa captures with extraordinary precision is the gap between the liberation that was promised and the liberation that was delivered: the gap between the revolutionary aspiration, the genuine desire for a new kind of social and political life that the independence movement expressed, and the postcolonial reality of a Bangladesh that reproduced colonial hierarchies in new institutional clothing, that rewarded opportunism rather than genuine commitment, and that failed to honor the sacrifices of those who had risked and in many cases lost everything in the struggle for independence.

The philosophical depth of *Omkar* lies in Sofa's refusal to attribute this gap simply to the bad faith of specific political actors. The novel presents the failure of liberation as a structural problem, rooted in the social conditions and cultural formations that the independence movement was not, by itself, equipped to transform. The people who fought for Bangladesh were Bengali Muslims shaped by the specific history of colonial subjugation, communal politics, and social hierarchy that the tradition has analyzed at length. Their personal virtues, their courage, their genuine desire for freedom, were not sufficient to overcome the structural conditions that shaped their collective social practice. Liberation required a transformation not merely of political institutions but of the cultural and psychic conditions that determined how people related to each other, how they understood authority and equality, and how they imagined the possibilities of collective life.

This insight, which Sofa expressed through the literary form of the novel in *Omkar*, is essentially the same insight that he expressed through the analytical form of the essay in *Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas*: that political liberation without cultural transformation is incomplete liberation, and that the intellectual class bears specific responsibility for either facilitating or obstructing the cultural transformation that genuine liberation requires.

35.3 Gabhi Bittanta: Satire as Social Anatomy

Sofa's 1995 novel *Gabhi Bittanta*, which translates as *A Tale of a Cow* and which has been widely described as one of the finest satirical novels in the Bengali language, represents the culmination of his literary engagement with the sociology of the Bangladeshi intellectual class. The novel is set in a university, a location that is not merely sociologically convenient but philosophically significant: the university is, in the tradition's analysis, the primary institutional site of the reproduction of cultural hierarchy and the primary location where the intellectual class that Sofa is anatomizing is produced and maintained.

The central satirical target of Gabhi Bittanta is the university teacher who has abandoned intellectual work in favor of political maneuvering, who uses the institutional authority of the academic position not to pursue genuine scholarship or to genuinely educate students but to build political networks, to accumulate institutional resources, and to perform the appearance of intellectual activity while actually doing something quite different. Sofa's portrayal of this type is devastating in its specificity and its psychological accuracy. The novel's characters are not cartoon villains but recognizable human beings whose mediocrity and moral compromise are presented with a sympathy that makes them all the more damning: these are people who might have been different in different conditions, whose corruption is the result of structural forces as much as personal failings, but whose accommodation to those structural forces has made them agents of the intellectual and cultural degradation that Sofa is documenting.

The novel's most celebrated scene, in which university teachers and administrators engage in a grotesque display of institutional competition and political maneuvering over a completely trivial issue, captures with satirical precision the dynamic that the tradition identifies as the central failure of Bangladeshi intellectual life: the displacement of genuine intellectual concern by the politics of institutional position and political alignment. The cow of the title is a brilliantly chosen symbol: both a sacred animal in the Hindu tradition and a productive but ultimately docile and exploitable creature, the cow figures the intellectual class that is simultaneously revered in a formal and conventional sense and systematically exploited by the political forces that require its services while denying it genuine autonomy and genuine respect.

35.4 The Poetry of Dissent: Sofa's Verse and Its Political Dimensions

Sofa was not only a novelist and essayist but a poet of considerable power, and his poetry has been, if anything, more completely ignored by subsequent critical attention than his fiction. This neglect is partly a function of the fact that his essays and his novelistic work have received the lion's share of critical attention, and partly a function of the specific formal challenges that his poetry poses. Sofa's verse is not accessible in the way that populist Bengali poetry tends to be; it is demanding, intellectually complex, and formally unconventional in ways that require readers who are willing to work at the text rather than receive it passively.

His long poem *Ekti Prabin Bater Jigyasa* (translated approximately as *The Inquiry of an Ancient Banyan Tree*), published in 1977, is perhaps the most philosophically ambitious of his poetic works. The poem uses the figure of a very old tree, a banyan whose roots and branches have grown over centuries to encompass an entire landscape, as a meditation on the relationship between the individual and the historical process. The tree has witnessed everything: the rise and fall of empires, the coming and going of conquerors, the liberation struggles and their betrayals, the promises made and broken by successive political formations. Its mode of inquiry is not the inquiry of the academic philosopher who seeks systematic answers to systematic questions but the inquiry of a being so deeply embedded in historical continuity that it can no longer distinguish between its own rootedness and the rootedness of the culture it has sheltered and witnessed.

The political significance of this poem in its specific historical moment, the period immediately following the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 and the military takeover that

followed, is considerable. In a period when direct political commentary was dangerous and politically charged writing was subject to censorship and official pressure, the poem's use of the tree as a figure for historical consciousness provided a way of saying things about the betrayal of liberation and the violence of political catastrophe that could not safely be said in more direct forms. This is not merely political caution; it is a principled conviction, which Sofa shared with many of the great literary modernists, that the oblique approach of literary symbolism and metaphor can achieve a depth and resonance that direct political statement cannot.

Salimullah Khan has argued that Sofa's poetry has been consistently undervalued relative to his prose, and that a full appreciation of Sofa's intellectual achievement requires serious engagement with the poetry as poetry rather than as merely a supplementary form to the essay and the novel. Khan's point is well taken. The poetry represents a dimension of Sofa's engagement with the possibilities of Bengali as a literary medium that his prose, for all its brilliance, cannot fully encompass. The specific music of the Bengali language, its capacity for semantic density and phonetic beauty that is quite different from the semantic density of philosophical prose, is what the poetry explores, and the exploration yields insights about the relationship between sound and sense, between aesthetic experience and political consciousness, that are not available in the discursive medium of the essay.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX: THE BENGALI MUSLIM MIND

Sofa's Landmark Essay, Its Historical Argument, and Its Enduring Controversy

36.1 The Genesis of a Landmark Text

Sofa's essay *Bangali Musalmaner Man*, which translates as *The Mind of the Bengali Muslims*, was first published in the *Monthly Samakal* in 1976 and subsequently collected in the volume of the same name that appeared in 1981. It is, by general consensus, the most important single essay in Bangladeshi intellectual history, and probably the most controversial. It is an essay that provoked fierce argument when it first appeared, that generated sustained critical engagement over the following decades, and that continues to be debated and cited in the Bangladesh of 2026 as a reference point for thinking about questions of identity, history, and cultural formation that have not been resolved and may not be resolvable in any simple way.

The essay's argument is historical in its method and philosophical in its ambition. Sofa sets out to trace the formation of Bengali Muslim identity across more than a millennium of history, from the early period of Muslim presence in Bengal through the Sultanate period, the Mughal era, the colonial period, and up to the present of independent Bangladesh. His aim is to understand what the specific historical experience of Bengali Muslims has produced in terms of a characteristic psychological and cultural orientation: a mode of being in the world, a set of dispositions and tendencies and characteristic responses to historical pressure, that can be identified as distinctively Bengali Muslim without being either essentialist in the sense of treating identity as fixed and unchanging or relativist in the sense of treating identity as purely contingent and therefore analytically inaccessible.

The essay was written at a specific historical moment, in the immediate aftermath of the liberation war and the assassination of Mujibur Rahman, a moment when the question of Bengali Muslim identity was both more urgent and more confused than at almost any previous point in history. The liberation war had been fought partly on the basis of a Bengali nationalist identity that challenged the Islamic nationalist identity on which Pakistan had been founded. But the reality of an independent Bangladesh was producing pressures toward religious identification that the purely secular Bengali nationalist framework was ill-equipped to address. Sofa's essay was, among other things, an attempt to think through this complexity in a way that avoided both the simplistic secularism that denied the genuine importance of Islamic identity for the majority of Bangladeshis and the simplistic Islamism that denied the equally genuine importance of Bengali linguistic and cultural identity.

36.2 The Historical Argument: Backwardness and Its Causes

The essay's central historical argument concerns the causes of what Sofa calls the relative backwardness of Bengali Muslims in comparison with Bengali Hindus across certain measurable dimensions of social and economic development during the colonial period. This is a sensitive subject that has generated enormous controversy, partly because the claim of comparative backwardness is empirically contested, partly because the causes that different analysts attribute to it are politically charged, and partly because the very framing of the question in terms of backwardness involves normative assumptions that are themselves contestable.

Sofa's historical argument rejects what he regards as the two most common and most misleading explanations for whatever genuine disparities existed between Bengali Hindu and Bengali Muslim social development. The first rejected explanation is the religious explanation: the claim that Islam, as a religion, is inherently hostile to modernity, to education, to rational inquiry, and to social progress, and that the relative underdevelopment of Bengali Muslims is therefore a consequence of their religious commitments. Sofa's rejection of this explanation is both empirically grounded and philosophically principled. Empirically, he argues that there is nothing in the history of Islamic civilization to support the claim that Islam is inherently anti-modern or anti-educational; quite the contrary, the great period of Islamic learning produced scientific, philosophical, and cultural achievements of the first order that were the foundation on which European modernity was itself built. The specific conditions of Bengali Muslim life that may have produced particular forms of intellectual and social development are not inherent in Islam as a religion but are the product of specific historical circumstances that can be analyzed and understood.

The second rejected explanation is the colonial explanation in its simplest form: the claim that the relative underdevelopment of Bengali Muslims was entirely and simply the result of British colonial policy, which favored Bengali Hindus in the educational and administrative systems at the expense of Bengali Muslims. This explanation contains genuine historical truth; British colonial policy did systematically disadvantage Bengali Muslims in certain respects, most importantly in the initial resistance to English education that characterized Muslim communities in Bengal in the first decades of British rule. But Sofa's analysis does not stop at this structural explanation. He is interested in the internal dynamics of Bengali Muslim society, in the ways in which Bengali Muslims responded to colonial pressure, in the social structures and cultural

formations that shaped those responses, and in the degree to which the specific character of Bengali Muslim intellectual and cultural life was itself an active agency in the historical process rather than merely a passive object of colonial manipulation.

Sofa's own explanation of the patterns he is analyzing focuses on the relationship between the ruling class and the mass people. His argument, developed with considerable historical specificity, is that the backwardness of Bengali Muslims in certain dimensions of social development is attributable primarily to the detachment of the Bengali Muslim ruling class from the mass people: the failure of the intellectual and social elite to take genuine responsibility for the development of the majority of the population, the tendency to seek the approval and the patronage of successive colonial and postcolonial powers at the expense of genuine engagement with the needs and aspirations of ordinary people, and the consequent failure to develop the kind of organic intellectual leadership that genuine social development requires.

This argument is simultaneously a historical diagnosis and a political critique. As a historical diagnosis, it locates the causes of specific social patterns in the dynamics of class relations within Bengali Muslim society rather than in some essential quality of Islam or some all-powerful external colonial force. As a political critique, it is directed at the intellectual and social elite of independent Bangladesh, who are identified as the inheritors of a tradition of ruling-class detachment from the mass people that has not been overcome by the formal achievement of independence.

36.3 The Reception of the Essay: Praise, Condemnation, and Contested Interpretation

The essay's reception, when it first appeared in 1976 and when the volume appeared in 1981, was polarized in a way that reflected both the essay's intellectual power and the political sensitivity of its subject matter. Some critics received it as a groundbreaking work of historical and sociological analysis that finally addressed with honesty questions that previous scholarship had avoided or distorted. Others condemned it as a misrepresentation of Bengali Muslim history, as an attack on Muslim identity masquerading as historical analysis, or as a work that provided ammunition for those who wanted to portray Bengali Muslims as inherently backward or problematic.

The controversy over the essay has not abated in the decades since its publication. If anything, it has intensified as the political stakes of questions about Bengali Muslim identity have increased. In the specific conditions of Bangladesh in the 2010s and 2020s, where the relationship between religious and secular identity in public life has been a persistent and often violently contested political question, the essay has continued to serve as a reference point for competing interpretations of what Bengali Muslim identity is and what it requires.

Salimullah Khan's engagement with the essay has been sustained and deeply sympathetic, though not uncritical. Khan's book *Ahmed Sofa Shanjibani* provides the most extended and most theoretically sophisticated engagement with the essay in the existing critical literature. Khan's central argument is that Sofa's essay achieves something that is extremely difficult to achieve in the analysis of collective identity: it maintains the historical specificity and the critical edge of genuine scholarship while remaining genuinely engaged with the living reality of the identity it is

analyzing, without either romanticizing that reality or subjecting it to the cold condescension of the outside observer who has no personal stake in what he is examining.

The essay's specific historical claims have been contested by historians who argue that Sofa's account of the Sultanate period and the Mughal era is idealized in ways that reflect more about the intellectual needs of post-liberation Bangladesh than about the actual historical record. These are legitimate scholarly objections that the tradition has engaged with, though not always with the full rigor that the historical questions require. What is more important for the purposes of this textbook is the essay's philosophical ambition and its cultural significance, which have not been diminished by the historical controversies it has generated.

36.4 The Essay's Continuing Significance in 2025 and 2026

The question of Bengali Muslim identity that Sofa's essay addresses has, if anything, become more urgently contested in the period since 2024. The political upheaval of 2024, which brought down the Awami League government that had governed Bangladesh since 2009, has generated intense debate about the cultural and ideological character of the new political dispensation. One dimension of this debate concerns the relationship between Bengali nationalism and Islamic identity in the new political landscape: whether the political forces that came to power in 2024 represent a Bengali nationalist tradition continuous with the liberation war, an Islamic political tradition that emphasizes Muslim identity over Bengali linguistic and cultural identity, or some combination of these that does not reduce to either.

Sofa's essay provides crucial resources for thinking through this question because it refuses the binary in which it is typically posed. The essay's central insight is that Bengali Muslim identity is not either Bengali or Muslim but both simultaneously, and that the specific historical formation of this identity is the result of a complex process in which linguistic, cultural, religious, and class factors have all played constitutive roles. The political implications of this insight for the Bangladesh of 2026 are considerable: if Bengali Muslim identity is genuinely complex in the way Sofa argues, then political formations that demand a choice between Bengali nationalist and Islamic identitarian politics are, in a deep sense, demanding something false, demanding that people choose between dimensions of their own identity that are historically inseparable.

Khan has developed this Sofaean insight in his own theoretical framework, arguing that the demand to choose between Bengali and Muslim identity reflects a kind of political pathology that he analyzes in Lacanian terms as a form of forced identification. The subject is being required to align with a particular symbolic identity that excludes other dimensions of the subject's historical and psychic formation, and this requirement is experienced as a form of psychic violence even by those who comply with it, because compliance requires the suppression of genuine aspects of the self that do not fit the demanded identity.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN: RAZZAQ'S SOCIOLOGY OF CULTURE

The Invisible Architecture of Intellectual Life and the Politics of Knowing

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37.1 Teaching as Cultural Production

Abdur Razzaq's most important cultural contribution was not a published text. It was a practice: the practice of teaching as a form of cultural production, as a way of generating intellectual life that was not reducible to the accumulation and reproduction of certified knowledge but was instead a continuous process of critical inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of human social life. Understanding Razzaq's contribution to the cultural dimension of the tradition requires grappling with the paradox that his most important cultural work was done through a medium that leaves no permanent textual trace, and that the evidence for its character and significance must be assembled from the testimony of those who experienced it.

The culture that Razzaq's teaching produced was, in the most precise sense, a culture of thinking: a shared orientation toward the activity of inquiry, a set of habits of mind and habits of conversation, a vocabulary for engaging with political and social questions, and above all a standard of intellectual seriousness and honesty that his students internalized and subsequently applied in their own work. Ahmed Sofa's relationship with Razzaq was the most productive of these pedagogical relationships, but it was not the only one. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Abu Mahmud, Kamal Hossain, and numerous other figures who would go on to play significant roles in Bangladesh's political and intellectual life all attended Razzaq's seminars and were shaped by his distinctive approach to intellectual inquiry.

What Razzaq's teaching provided was not primarily a set of conclusions about specific political and cultural questions, though he had considered views about many such questions. What it provided was a method, a way of approaching questions that combined deep historical knowledge with sociological analysis, comparative perspective with attention to local specificity, and systematic thinking with the willingness to hold open questions without premature closure. This method is, in the tradition's analysis, one of the most important cultural resources available to any intellectual community, because it provides the means for thinking genuinely rather than merely performing the appearance of thought.

37.2 The Problem of Oral Culture in a Text-Dominated Academic World

The paradox of Razzaq's position in the tradition is sharpest at the point of his refusal to publish. In a world where academic culture is organized around the production and evaluation of written texts, where the intellectual's authority is certified by the published record of their thinking, and where influence is measured primarily by citation counts and the number of book titles attached to a name, Razzaq's oral intellectual practice represents a systematic challenge to the dominant model of what intellectual work is and how it should be conducted.

The challenge is not merely practical, though the practical consequences are significant: because Razzaq's thinking was not published in systematic form, it is more difficult to reconstruct and evaluate than the thinking of figures who wrote extensively, and its influence operates through a more complex chain of mediation involving the testimony, the recollections, and the published work of those who knew and heard him. The challenge is also philosophical: it raises the question of whether the dominance of the written text in academic culture is itself a culturally

and politically specific choice that serves specific interests, or whether it is simply a neutral and universal requirement of systematic knowledge.

Razzaq's position, as reconstructed from the accounts of those who knew him, was that oral intellectual exchange has genuine advantages over written publication that are not merely practical but philosophical. The Socratic tradition, to which he was genuinely indebted, holds that genuine philosophical inquiry cannot be fully conducted in written form because writing freezes thought in a way that prevents the continuing responsiveness to objection, qualification, and new evidence that genuine inquiry requires. The dialogue, the conversation, the seminar, preserve the essentially provisional and responsive character of genuine thought in a way that the published text, which must be formulated for an absent and silent reader, cannot.

Whether one fully accepts this Socratic argument or not, its significance for the culture that Razzaq created is undeniable. His students learned, in his seminars, that genuine intellectual engagement requires a different orientation from the orientation required for the production of publishable academic texts. It requires the willingness to think aloud, to be wrong in front of others, to change one's mind in response to argument, to hold conclusions lightly, and to treat the questioning of one's own positions not as an attack to be repelled but as an opportunity to think more carefully. These are habits of mind that are not easily acquired from books, however good the books may be, and that require cultivation in the specific social conditions of genuine intellectual exchange.

37.3 Razzaq's Political Sociology of Bengali Culture

While Razzaq did not produce a published cultural theory in the systematic sense, the accounts of his thinking that survive in the recollections of his students and in the few written sources that document his views allow a reconstruction of the broad outlines of his sociological understanding of Bengali culture and its relationship to political life.

At the center of Razzaq's cultural sociology is a deep concern with the formation and transformation of political culture: the set of values, norms, habits, and orientations that shape how people participate in political life, how they relate to political institutions, and what kinds of political behavior they regard as legitimate or illegitimate. Political culture, in Razzaq's understanding, is not merely a list of attitudes that can be catalogued and compared across societies. It is a historically formed and continuously forming set of dispositions that emerge from the specific social, economic, and historical conditions of a particular society, and that cannot be understood or transformed without understanding those conditions.

Applied to Bangladesh, Razzaq's political-cultural analysis focused on several interconnected patterns that he regarded as obstacles to genuine democratic development. The patron-client character of Bengali political relationships, in which political loyalty flows toward whoever controls access to material resources rather than toward the best political program or the most honest political leader, was understood by Razzaq not as an irrational cultural defect but as a rational adaptation to conditions of material scarcity and institutional unreliability. In conditions where formal institutions cannot be trusted to deliver justice, where the rule of law is unreliable, and where material survival depends on personal connections to those with power and resources,

the cultivation of patron-client relationships is not a failure of political sophistication but a sensible strategy for navigating a difficult world.

But this rationality is precisely what makes the patron-client political culture so resistant to transformation. The behavior that is individually rational, given the structural conditions of material scarcity and institutional unreliability, produces collective outcomes that perpetuate those very conditions: it prevents the development of impersonal, rule-bound institutions because it treats institutional positions as resources to be deployed for personal and network benefit rather than as offices to be discharged with impartiality; it prevents the development of programmatic political parties because it treats political affiliation as a personal loyalty relationship rather than an ideological commitment; and it prevents the development of an independent civil society because it draws individuals and organizations into the patronage networks of the state and the political elite.

Razzaq's solution to this problem was not a technological or procedural fix: not constitutional engineering or institutional reform, though he took these seriously. It was, more fundamentally, a cultural transformation, the development of the habits of political engagement, the norms of public conduct, and the expectations of institutional behavior that genuine democratic political life requires and that currently existing political culture in Bangladesh does not provide. And the agent of this cultural transformation, in Razzaq's analysis, was precisely the intellectual class whose failures Sofa would subsequently diagnose with such merciless precision.

37.4 The Colonial Inheritance in Cultural Life: Razzaq's Structural Analysis

Razzaq's structural analysis of Bangladeshi cultural life was, at its most fundamental level, an analysis of colonial inheritance. He understood the patterns of political culture, educational organization, and intellectual life that he observed in Bangladesh as the products of a colonial history that did not simply end with political independence. The colonial period established specific institutional forms, specific hierarchies of knowledge and language, specific patterns of elite formation, and specific relationships between the educated class and the mass of the population, and these colonial forms persisted into the postcolonial period not because they were explicitly maintained but because they were embedded in the social and institutional structures that independence reproduced rather than transformed.

The most important of these colonial inheritances, in Razzaq's analysis, was the educational system. The British colonial educational system, established in Bengal on the principles articulated in Macaulay's Minute of 1835, was designed to produce a class of Indians who would serve as intermediaries between the colonial administration and the mass population: people who would be, in Macaulay's notorious phrase, Indian in blood and color but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. This goal was substantially achieved, and the educational system that produced it was not dismantled by political independence; it was reproduced, with modifications, in the postcolonial educational institutions of both India and Bangladesh.

The consequence, in Razzaq's analysis, was the reproduction of the colonial class hierarchy in postcolonial conditions: a class of educated, English-speaking professionals who participated in global circuits of culture, commerce, and knowledge production, and who were in crucial ways

more connected to London, New York, or Delhi than to the villages and towns of the country they nominally served. This is the class that Sofa would anatomize in his essays and satirize in his fiction, and that Khan would subject to Lacanian-Marxist analysis in his theoretical writings. But it was Razzaq who first identified the structural conditions of this class's formation in the specific history of colonial education and who understood its persistence into the postcolonial period as a structural rather than a personal failure.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT: KHAN'S THEORY OF CULTURAL COLONIALISM

Language, Power, and the Postcolonial Subject in Lacanian-Marxist Perspective

38.1 The Theoretical Framework: Lacan, Marx, and the Colonial Subject

Salimullah Khan's theoretical contribution to the tradition's cultural analysis is distinguished by its explicit and sustained engagement with two bodies of Western theory that his predecessors drew on more selectively and less systematically: Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist political economy. Khan does not simply apply these theories to the Bangladeshi context as if they were neutral tools that could be imported from their original intellectual environments without modification. Rather, he uses them in a mutually critical dialogue with the specific historical and cultural materials of Bengal and Bangladesh, allowing the theoretical frameworks to illuminate the specific conditions while also allowing those conditions to test and where necessary modify the theoretical frameworks.

The Lacanian dimension of Khan's theoretical work is, for many readers, the most unfamiliar and the most challenging. Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst and theorist whose reworking of Freudian concepts in structural-linguistic terms generated a body of theory that has been enormously influential in literary criticism, film studies, and cultural theory, is not a name that appears frequently in Bangladeshi intellectual discourse. Khan's sustained engagement with Lacan, which began in the late 1990s and has continued to the present, represents a genuine theoretical innovation that has allowed him to address questions about subjectivity, desire, identification, and political formation that the more straightforwardly sociological frameworks of Razzaq and Sofa could not fully address.

The key Lacanian concepts that Khan employs in his cultural analysis are the concepts of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, and the related concepts of identification, the objet petit a (the object-cause of desire), and the big Other (the symbolic order that structures the subject's social reality). For Khan, these concepts provide a vocabulary for analyzing the specific ways in which colonial power operates not merely at the level of economic exploitation and political domination but at the level of psychic formation: the ways in which colonialism shapes the desires, the identifications, the self-understanding, and the orientation toward the world of the colonized subject.

The Marxist dimension of Khan's work provides the economic and social structural analysis that the Lacanian framework alone cannot provide. The Lacanian account of how the colonial subject

is formed in relation to the symbolic order of colonial power needs to be grounded in a concrete analysis of the material conditions, the class relations, the patterns of economic exploitation, and the institutional structures, that produce and maintain those psychic formations. Khan's synthesis of Lacan and Marx, which has affinities with but is not simply derived from the work of Slavoj Žižek, whose own Lacan-Marx synthesis has been enormously influential in contemporary critical theory, represents an original theoretical contribution that has yielded distinctive insights into the specifically Bangladeshi conditions it is applied to.

38.2 The Colonial Language and the Split Subject

Khan's most important specific theoretical contribution to the tradition's cultural analysis is his theory of what he calls the linguistic split of the postcolonial Bangladeshi subject. This theory holds that the dominance of English in the most prestigious institutional settings of Bangladeshi intellectual and professional life produces a specific form of psychic division in Bangladeshi subjects who are educated in or aspire to English-medium institutional culture.

The split occurs because the subject is required to conduct the most important and most highly valorized aspects of their intellectual and professional life in a language that is not their native language, that carries within it the symbolic weight of colonial authority, and that positions the subject in a specific relation to the symbolic order: as someone who is performing a cultural identity that is not authentically their own, who is speaking in the voice of the colonial authority rather than in their own voice, and who is in consequence always, in some sense, divided between the authentic self that speaks Bengali and the performed self that speaks English.

This psychic division is not merely an inconvenience. In Khan's analysis, it is a constitutive feature of Bangladeshi elite subjectivity that has profound consequences for the character of Bangladeshi intellectual and cultural life. The intellectual who thinks in Bengali but publishes in English is not simply translating; the intellectual who was educated in a Bengali-medium system but must operate in English-medium institutional contexts is not simply code-switching; the student who aspires to English-medium education because they understand that English proficiency is a prerequisite for access to the most desirable social positions is not simply making a rational educational choice. All of these situations involve a specific relationship to the colonial symbolic order that shapes the subject's desires, identifications, and self-understanding in ways that go far beyond the merely linguistic.

The political consequence of this analysis is that the struggle for Bengali as the medium of education is not merely a cultural preference or a nationalist sentiment. It is, in Khan's theoretical framework, a struggle for the conditions under which genuine subjective integrity, the condition in which the subject can speak in their own voice rather than in the voice of the colonial authority, is possible. A society in which the most intelligent and ambitious young people systematically abandon their native language in favor of the colonial language is a society that is reproducing, at the level of psychic formation, the colonial hierarchy that formal political independence was supposed to have dismantled.

Khan has argued that without establishing Bengali as the main medium of education in all stages, the decolonization process would lag behind, and the colonial cringe toward English would

persist in the social dynamics of Bangladesh. [Wikipedia](#) But in his own theoretical writings, this argument is not presented as a merely cultural preference. It is presented as a political necessity grounded in a theory of how subjective formation, linguistic practice, and social power are constitutively interconnected.

38.3 The Pervert Ruling Class: Khan's Lacanian Political Diagnosis

One of the most provocative and the most theoretically original of Khan's applications of Lacanian theory to Bangladeshi cultural and political life is his use of the Lacanian concept of perversion to characterize the orientation of the Bangladeshi ruling class toward the question of language and education.

In Lacanian theory, perversion does not have the moral connotations that the word carries in ordinary usage. It refers, rather, to a specific structure of desire: the structure in which the subject knows very well what they are supposed to value, what the symbolic order requires of them, and what they say they value, but their actual practice reveals that they do not actually value what they say they value. The pervert, in Lacan's technical sense, is not someone who does not know the law or who defies the law; it is someone who knows the law very well, acknowledges it in words, and systematically violates it in practice while remaining unaware of the contradiction between their stated values and their actual behavior.

Citing Freud and Lacan, Khan wrote that the people of the ruling class are perverse since their acts and thoughts do not reflect their words. He also called them traitors to the nation. [Wikipedia](#) The specific application of this concept to the language question runs as follows. The Bangladeshi ruling class formally endorses Bengali as the state language, acknowledges its constitutional and political significance, celebrates the Language Movement of 1952 as a founding moment of national identity, and pays rhetorical tribute to the importance of Bengali in public discourse. But in practice, the same ruling class systematically chooses English-medium education for its own children, conducts its most important professional activities in English, and consistently makes institutional decisions that maintain the privileged position of English in the educational and professional systems of the country. The contradiction between what they say and what they do, in Khan's analysis, is not hypocrisy in the ordinary sense (which implies conscious awareness of the contradiction) but a structural perversion in the Lacanian sense: a contradiction that is systematic, that serves specific structural interests, and that the subjects involved are, in a specific psychoanalytic sense, unable to see.

This is a theoretically bold and politically charged argument that has generated considerable controversy. Critics have argued that the application of a clinical psychoanalytic concept to a social class is a category error, that it pathologizes what is simply rational self-interest, and that it obscures the genuine complexity of linguistic politics in Bangladesh by reducing it to a single psychoanalytic schema. These are serious objections that deserve serious engagement. But the argument has also been defended by those who find in it a genuinely illuminating account of the specific dynamics of postcolonial linguistic politics, an account that explains something that purely economic or sociological frameworks have difficulty explaining: why elites who are not simply cynical or hypocritical but who genuinely hold the values they profess are nevertheless

systematically unable to act in accordance with those values on the question of language and education.

38.4 The Epistemic Divide: Khan's Cultural Imperialism Thesis

Khan's cultural analysis extends beyond the specific question of language to a broader thesis about what he calls cultural imperialism: the systematic process by which the cultural products, the aesthetic standards, the intellectual frameworks, and the knowledge systems of the dominant powers are imposed on subordinate societies in ways that undermine the development of indigenous cultural production and indigenous intellectual frameworks.

Khan links the systemic bias toward English to broader cultural imperialism, where English-medium dominance sustains an epistemic divide: urban elites accrue symbolic capital for global integration, while rural and lower-class populations face barriers to foundational knowledge, perpetuating dependency on imported paradigms rather than indigenous causal reasoning. [Groklopedia](#)

This thesis is not original to Khan; it has been developed by numerous postcolonial theorists, from Frantz Fanon and Aime Cesaire through Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak to the more recent work of scholars in the decolonizing knowledge tradition. What Khan contributes is a specific application of this thesis to the Bangladeshi context that goes beyond the general statements of the theoretical tradition to engage with the specific institutional conditions, class dynamics, and psychic formations of Bangladeshi cultural life.

The epistemic divide that Khan identifies is not simply a divide between those who speak English and those who speak only Bengali. It is a divide between two different relationships to knowledge: a relationship in which knowledge is understood as something produced in the metropolitan centers of the global academy and imported into peripheral societies like Bangladesh, versus a relationship in which knowledge is understood as something that can be genuinely produced in and from the specific conditions of a particular society and that can make a genuine contribution to the global accumulation of human understanding. The dominance of the imported-knowledge model, in Khan's analysis, is not simply a practical preference for efficient knowledge transfer; it is a relationship to knowledge that reproduces colonial hierarchy at the epistemic level by positioning Bangladeshi thinkers permanently as consumers of knowledge produced elsewhere rather than as producers of genuinely original thought.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE: LITERATURE AS SOCIAL DOCUMENT

The Tradition's Engagement with Fiction, Poetry, and the Politics of Form

39.1 Literary Criticism as Political Practice

The tradition's engagement with Bengali literature has never been confined to the disinterested aestheticism of professional literary criticism whose primary concern is formal analysis and

whose political commitments, if any, remain separate from its critical practice. For all three figures, literary criticism is a form of political practice: a way of engaging with the social and cultural questions that literature raises, of evaluating the contribution of specific literary works to the development or the obstruction of the cultural transformation that the tradition consistently demands, and of using the critical engagement with literature as a way of illuminating the broader conditions of social and political life that literature both reflects and helps to constitute.

This does not mean that the tradition's literary criticism is purely instrumental, reducing works of literature to mere reflections of social conditions or propaganda for particular political positions. Sofa's literary criticism, in particular, is distinguished by a genuine aesthetic sensibility that takes the specific formal qualities of literary works seriously and that insists that the political significance of a literary work cannot be assessed independently of its literary quality. A politically correct but aesthetically poor work is, in Sofa's critical framework, a failure, because literature that fails as literature fails to achieve the specific kind of illumination and transformation that genuine literary achievement can produce. The relationship between aesthetic quality and political significance is not one of simple identity, but neither is it one of simple independence: the works of literature that have genuinely mattered for the cultural and political development of Bengali society are works that have been both aesthetically powerful and politically significant, and the two dimensions are not accidentally combined.

39.2 The Canon Debate: What Bengali Literature Is and What It Should Be

One of the most important cultural debates in which the tradition has been involved is the debate about the Bengali literary canon: the question of which works are regarded as the central achievements of Bengali literary tradition, which authors are held up as models of excellence, and whose voices and perspectives are included in or excluded from the official account of what Bengali literature is.

This is not a merely academic question. Canon formation is a political act: it establishes which cultural productions are treated as worthy of sustained attention and critical engagement, which are marginalized or ignored, and who is positioned as the legitimate heir to a tradition and who is positioned as peripheral or supplementary to it. In the specific context of Bengali literature, the canon debate has been organized around several fault lines that the tradition has engaged with at different points.

The first fault line is the fault line between Bangladesh and West Bengal: the question of whether there is a single Bengali literary tradition of which Bangladeshi literature is a part, or whether there are two distinct traditions with important connections but also important divergences. This question has obvious political dimensions, given the political separation of the two Bengals and the very different social, political, and cultural conditions that have shaped literary production on the two sides of the border. The tradition's general position, which is not without its own tensions, has been to insist on the unity of the Bengali literary tradition while also insisting on the specificity of the Bangladeshi contribution to that tradition and on the inadequacy of canonical accounts that treat West Bengali literature as the standard and measure of excellence against which Bangladeshi literature is evaluated.

The second fault line is the fault line between Hindu and Muslim contributions to Bengali literature. The Bengali literary tradition as canonically understood has been dominated by Hindu writers, partly for straightforward demographic reasons given the Hindu majority in the western Bengal that has historically been the center of Bengali cultural production, and partly for reasons connected to the specific educational and social conditions of Bengali Hindus that facilitated literary production in the colonial period. The relative underrepresentation of Bengali Muslim writers in the canonical account of Bengali literary tradition is a cultural and political problem that all three figures in the tradition have addressed, each in their own way.

Sofa's essay *Bangali Musalmaner Man* explicitly challenges the marginalization of Bengali Muslim literary contributions by tracing the history of Bengali Muslim cultural production across the centuries and arguing that this production represents a genuine and distinctive contribution to Bengali literature that cannot be assimilated to the Hindu-dominated canonical account. Khan's work on Kazi Nazrul Islam pursues a similar argument by positioning Nazrul not merely as a poet who transcended the Hindu-Muslim divide but as a specifically anti-colonial writer whose political significance has been systematically obscured by canonical accounts that reduce him to a sentimental nationalist or a romantic poet.

39.3 The Novel as Form and the Question of Bengali Modernity

The novel as a literary form has a specific significance in the tradition's cultural analysis that goes beyond its importance as a medium for specific literary achievements. The novel is, in its historical origins and its characteristic concerns, the literary form of modernity: the form that emerged alongside and in complex relationship with the rise of capitalism, the development of the bourgeoisie, the consolidation of the nation-state, and the transformation of social life from the organic communities of traditional society to the more mobile, more individualized, and more complex social formations of modern life. The history of the novel in Bengal, and in Bangladesh specifically, is therefore also a history of Bengali modernity and of the specific, contested, and incomplete ways in which modernity has been realized in the Bengal context.

Sofa's own novelistic work is acutely conscious of this historical dimension. His novels are not merely stories about specific people in specific situations; they are explorations of what it means to be a modern Bengali Muslim subject in the specific conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh. The alienation, the questioning, the failure of established frameworks to provide adequate orientation, the gap between aspiration and social reality, that characterize the inner lives of his fictional protagonists are not purely personal psychological states; they are the specific psychic consequences of the specific historical situation of the Bengali Muslim intellectual in a society that is navigating the transition from colonial to postcolonial conditions while simultaneously grappling with the unresolved tensions between religious and secular, traditional and modern, indigenous and imported orientations.

Khan's analysis of the Bangladeshi novel draws on his broader theoretical framework to argue that the specific forms that the Bengali novel has taken in Bangladesh, and the specific literary achievements and failures that the tradition of Bangladeshi fiction represents, reflect the specific psychic and social conditions of postcolonial Bengali Muslim life. His Lacanian approach allows him to read the formal features of specific novels, their narrative structure, their characterization,

their relationship to time and history, as symptoms of the underlying social and psychic conditions that they both reflect and help to reproduce or challenge.

CHAPTER FORTY: THE RABINDRANATH QUESTION

A Fault Line in the Tradition and the Politics of Literary Inheritance

40.1 The Central Ambivalence

No question in the cultural politics of Bangladesh is more charged than the question of Rabindranath Tagore, and no question better illustrates the specific tensions within the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan than the divergent ways in which the three figures have approached this question. Tagore is, by any measure, the greatest figure in Bengali literary history: a poet, novelist, playwright, essayist, musician, and educational philosopher of extraordinary range and depth, whose achievement was recognized by the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 and who has had an influence on Bengali culture that is simply without parallel. Yet Tagore's relationship to Bangladesh is complex, contested, and politically charged in ways that make simple reverence as impossible as simple rejection.

The complexity begins with the question of religious identity. Tagore was a Bengali Hindu whose literary, philosophical, and cultural vision was shaped by the Brahmo Samaj tradition and by his engagement with both Indian and Western philosophical and artistic traditions. His relationship to Bengali Muslim life was not hostile, but it was not characterized by a deep insider knowledge either. The Bengali Muslim experience, the specific historical conditions, the specific social formations, the specific religious and cultural orientations that Sofa's essay analyzes, are not the central subject of Tagore's literary world. They appear at its margins, viewed from the outside, and the perspective from which they are viewed is the perspective of the educated Bengali Hindu intellectual whose social world is not the same as the social world of the Bengali Muslim majority.

The political complexity compounds the religious complexity. Tagore is the author of the national anthem of Bangladesh, *Amar Sonar Bangla*, which was adopted as the national anthem of the new state in 1972, and is simultaneously the author of the national anthem of India, *Jana Gana Mana*. This double role, as the cultural figure whose words define both nations, is both a powerful symbol of the cultural unity of the two Bengals and a source of political complexity in a context where the relationship between Bangladesh and India has been, and continues to be, contentious. In the post-2024 political environment of Bangladesh, where concerns about Indian influence and interference have intensified, the question of Tagore's cultural authority has taken on a new political valence that was not present in the same way in earlier decades.

40.2 Sofa's Engagement with Tagore: Admiration and Critique

Sofa's engagement with Tagore was one of the most sustained and intellectually complex in the tradition. Sofa genuinely admired Tagore's literary achievement; his respect for the quality and

range of Tagore's creative work is evident throughout his critical writings on the subject. But Sofa's admiration was never uncritical, and his critical engagement with Tagore's work and with Tagore's influence on Bengali literary culture generated some of his most interesting and most controversial essays.

Sofa's fundamental critique of Tagore's cultural influence is not a critique of Tagore's literary quality, which he regarded as genuine and in many respects unsurpassable, but a critique of the institutional position that Tagore's work came to occupy in Bengali literary culture: a position of canonical authority so overwhelming that it effectively prevented the development of alternative literary values and alternative aesthetic approaches. The Rabindra-centric Bengali literary canon, in Sofa's analysis, had become a form of cultural monopoly that positioned any Bengali literary production that diverged from Tagore's aesthetic standards as inferior, marginal, or illegitimate.

This critique connects directly to the question of Bengali Muslim literary production. Bengali Muslim writers working in the twentieth century faced a double bind: they wrote in a literary tradition whose canonical standards were set by a figure whose social world was not theirs, whose religious and cultural formation was different from theirs, and whose literary vision, for all its universality, reflected a social reality that the Bengali Muslim experience did not fully share. Yet to depart from those canonical standards was to risk being dismissed as inferior or peripheral by the literary establishment that those standards defined.

Sofa's response to this double bind was not to abandon Tagore or to pretend that Tagore's achievement was less than it was. It was to insist on the legitimacy and importance of cultural production that drew on different traditions, different experiences, and different aesthetic approaches, without claiming that such production was better than Tagore's but also without accepting the claim that it was worse. The Bengali Muslim literary tradition had its own resources, its own achievements, its own characteristic forms and concerns, and the development of genuinely Bangladeshi literary culture required both the honest acknowledgment of what Tagore had achieved and the equally honest acknowledgment of the limits of a canon built entirely around his achievement.

40.3 Khan's Structural Critique: Tagore, Language, and the Politics of Orthography

Khan's engagement with Tagore is more explicitly theoretical than Sofa's and focuses on specific aspects of Tagore's cultural legacy that have had concrete institutional consequences in Bangladesh. Most notably, Khan has been consistently critical of Tagore's prescriptions on Bengali orthography, arguing that Tagore's proposals for the simplification of Bengali script, which have been widely influential in West Bengali literary circles, are not neutral technical proposals about how best to represent the Bengali language in written form but politically charged interventions that reflect specific cultural assumptions and that have specific consequences for the relationship between written and spoken Bengali.

The orthography question might seem a narrow technical concern, but Khan's analysis reveals it as a microcosm of broader questions about cultural authority, language policy, and the politics of standardization. Tagore's orthographic proposals, which favored certain forms of written Bengali over others, effectively positioned the Bengali of the educated Calcutta elite as the standard and

measure of correct Bengali, marginalizing the specific features of spoken Bengali as used by the majority of the population, including the majority of Bangladeshis, whose Bengali deviates significantly from the Calcutta-centered standard in vocabulary, pronunciation, and syntactic patterns.

For Khan, this is not merely a linguistic matter. It is an instance of the broader dynamic by which cultural authority is exercised through the definition of standards that are presented as neutral and universal but that actually privilege specific social groups and specific social locations. The dominance of the Calcutta-centered Bengali standard in the literary culture of Bangladesh, which the canonical authority of Tagore has helped to maintain, is in Khan's analysis a continuation of colonial-era cultural hierarchy under different auspices: not colonial hierarchy in the crude sense of British over Bengali, but a more subtle hierarchy in which the cosmopolitan, English-educated, Hindu Bengali intellectual of Calcutta is positioned as the model of cultural sophistication against which the Bengali Muslim intellectual of Dhaka is measured and found wanting.

40.4 Razzaq on Tagore: Historical Perspective and Political Caution

Razzaq's known position on Tagore was characterized by the historical perspective and the political caution that marked his approach to all contentious cultural questions. He regarded Tagore as a figure of genuine historical importance whose literary achievement was not in question but whose cultural significance for Bangladesh needed to be understood in its specific historical context rather than either idolized or dismissed.

Razzaq's historical perspective on Tagore connected to his broader analysis of the formation of Bengali nationalism: the complex process by which a specifically Bengali cultural identity was articulated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the role that literary culture and specifically Tagore's literary culture played in that articulation, and the ways in which that articulation, for all its genuine achievements, reflected the social position and the cultural assumptions of the educated Hindu Bengali elite rather than the experience of the broader Bengali population.

This historical perspective allowed Razzaq to honor Tagore's genuine achievement while also being clear-eyed about the ways in which the canonical position that Tagore's work had been assigned reflected specific political and cultural choices that had specific consequences for Bengali Muslim cultural production. Razzaq's characteristic approach to this question, as to most contentious questions, was to hold the complexity in view without reducing it to a simple judgment: not the simple affirmation of Tagore as Bangladesh's greatest cultural resource, nor the simple rejection of Tagore as culturally irrelevant or even hostile to Bangladeshi cultural development, but the more difficult and more honest acknowledgment that Tagore's cultural legacy is genuinely complex and that engaging honestly with that complexity is more productive than either simple reverence or simple rejection.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE: KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM AND THE ANTI-COLONIAL TRADITION

Reclaiming a Radical Legacy for Bangladeshi Cultural Politics

41.1 Nazrul as Cultural Property: The Contest for a Legacy

If the question of Tagore reveals the fault lines within the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, the question of Kazi Nazrul Islam reveals the tradition's most sustained and most passionate affirmative cultural commitment. Nazrul, the poet known in Bengali culture as the Rebel Poet (Bidrohi Kabi), is a figure whose cultural legacy has been the subject of intense contestation in Bangladesh, India, and the global Bengali diaspora. Born in 1899 in the Burdwan district of undivided Bengal, dying in 1976 in Dhaka after nearly three decades of mental incapacity that silenced him during the period of Bangladesh's political formation, Nazrul was in his active career one of the most prolific, most formally innovative, and most politically engaged poets in the history of the Bengali language.

The specific character of Nazrul's cultural legacy that makes it so important for the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is its combination of Bengali linguistic mastery, Islamic devotional content, Hindu philosophical imagery, and anti-colonial political rage. Nazrul's poetry draws simultaneously on the entire range of Bengali literary and musical tradition, on Persian and Arabic poetic forms and religious content, on the Sanskrit tradition filtered through Bengali literary history, and on the immediate political conditions of colonial Bengal with a directness and a ferocity that no Bengali poet before him had achieved. He is the poet who wrote about the British Raj's violence and exploitation with a specific contempt for colonial authority that expressed what millions of colonized subjects felt but had been unable to say in the specific forms and with the specific intensity that Nazrul achieved.

For the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, the question of Nazrul's legacy is the question of what kind of cultural resource his work provides for the Bangladeshi cultural project that the tradition is committed to. The answer depends on how Nazrul is read: which dimensions of his work are emphasized, which aspects of his political and cultural identity are foregrounded, and what kind of tradition his work is understood to represent.

41.2 Salimullah Khan's Reading of Nazrul: Anti-Colonial Democrat

Khan's reading of Nazrul is the most theoretically developed in the tradition and the most politically explicit. Khan has argued, across multiple essays and public interventions, that Nazrul is fundamentally an anti-colonial and democratic thinker whose political significance has been systematically obscured by the dominant cultural establishments of both India and Bangladesh.

Khan views Kazi Nazrul Islam as an anti-colonial and democratic thinker cherished dearly by the people of Bengal. [Tritiyomatra](#) But Khan's elaboration of this view goes far beyond the straightforward claim that Nazrul opposed British colonial rule. For Khan, Nazrul's anti-colonialism is not merely political in the conventional sense; it is cultural and psychic. Nazrul's poetry refuses, at the level of its specific formal choices, the colonial hierarchy of cultural values

that positioned English literary culture as superior and Bengali literary culture as inferior. It does this not by arguing against that hierarchy but by simply producing literary work of unmistakable power and beauty that demonstrates, by its own achievement, the falseness of the colonial hierarchy's central claim.

Khan's reading of Nazrul also emphasizes the democratic dimension of his cultural politics: the way in which Nazrul's poetry addresses itself to the common people, not in a patronizing way that talks down to them or that simplifies complex ideas for their consumption, but in a way that recognizes the common people as the primary audience and the primary subject of genuinely Bengali cultural production. This democratic orientation, in Khan's analysis, contrasts with the orientation of much canonical Bengali literary culture, including some aspects of Tagore's cultural politics, which tends to address itself to the educated elite and to treat the common people as objects of aesthetic or philosophical reflection rather than as subjects with their own cultural agency.

The democratic reading of Nazrul also connects to Khan's broader political analysis of the liberation war and its consequences. The three fundamental principles of the liberation war that Khan has consistently articulated, equality, human dignity, and social justice, are precisely the values that Nazrul's poetry expresses in its specific literary forms: the equality of all human beings before the claim of creative expression, the dignity of the marginalized and the oppressed who are the central subjects of Nazrul's poetic vision, and the demand for justice against the specific injustices of colonial exploitation and communal violence.

41.3 Sofa's Nazrul: The Rebel Poet and the Problem of Compromise

Sofa's engagement with Nazrul was more complicated than Khan's and more characteristic of Sofa's broader intellectual style: deeply sympathetic to what he regarded as Nazrul's genuine achievement, but unwilling to romanticize it or to overlook what he regarded as its genuine limitations and tensions.

Sofa's central concern with Nazrul's legacy was the question of how the extraordinary energy and the genuine political radicalism of Nazrul's best work related to the aspects of his later career that could be read as a form of accommodation to established cultural and political authority. The Nazrul of the early 1920s, the poet of Bidrohi (The Rebel) and of the numerous directly political poems that challenged British colonial authority with a directness and intensity that was genuinely unprecedented in Bengali literary history, was the Nazrul that Sofa found most valuable and most instructive. The later Nazrul, whose output included more devotional poetry and whose public persona was more acceptable to the cultural mainstream, raised for Sofa the question of the relationship between personal creative energy and the social conditions that either sustain or dissipate that energy.

This concern is directly connected to Sofa's broader analysis of the intellectual class and its tendency toward accommodation and opportunism. Nazrul's life trajectory, in Sofa's reading, is not simply a story of personal decline (the mental illness that incapacitated him from 1942 until his death was a tragic fact that was beyond his control and that Sofa approached with genuine compassion) but a story that raises structural questions about the conditions under which genuine

cultural radicalism can be sustained and the conditions under which it tends to be absorbed and neutralized by the cultural mainstream it was challenging.

41.4 Nazrul and Bengali Muslim Identity: The Cultural Bridge

One of the most important aspects of Nazrul's significance for the tradition's cultural analysis is the specific role his work plays in the ongoing question of Bengali Muslim identity. Nazrul is, uniquely among the major figures of Bengali literary history, a figure who is equally central to both Bengali Hindu and Bengali Muslim cultural traditions. His devotional Islamic poetry, his ghazals and hamd and naat, are as much a part of the Bengali Muslim cultural heritage as his anti-colonial political poetry; yet his Shyama Sangit, his devotional poems addressed to the Hindu goddess Kali, and his use of Sanskrit and Hindu philosophical imagery throughout his work, make him equally central to Bengali Hindu literary culture.

This double centrality is, in the tradition's analysis, not a sign of Nazrul's compromise or his inability to commit to a single cultural tradition. It is rather the expression of a cultural vision that refuses the communal divide that colonial politics had imposed on Bengali society, that insists on the possibility of a Bengali cultural life in which Hindu and Muslim traditions enrich rather than exclude each other, and that demonstrates, by its specific literary achievements, that the binary of Hindu versus Muslim is inadequate to the actual complexity of Bengali cultural experience.

For Sofa, this dimension of Nazrul's legacy was particularly important because it provided a model, in literary form, of the kind of cultural synthesis that his essay *Bangali Musalmaner Man* was arguing for in historical and analytical terms. The Bengali Muslim mind, in Sofa's analysis, is not a mind that has simply replaced Hindu Bengali culture with Islamic culture; it is a mind shaped by a long historical encounter between Bengali indigenous traditions, Hindu cultural influences, and the Islamic tradition introduced through Persian and Arab connections. Nazrul's work embodies this complex formation more completely than any other Bengali literary achievement, and it is for this reason that both Sofa and Khan regard Nazrul as the central figure in any genuinely Bangladeshi cultural tradition.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO: THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION

Khan, Sofa, and the Practice of Cultural Exchange Across Linguistic Borders

42.1 Translation as Political Practice

Both Sofa and Khan have been active translators, and the theoretical significance of their translation practice for the tradition's broader cultural project has been insufficiently appreciated. Translation, in the most common understanding, is a secondary activity: a technical practice that serves as a vehicle for importing ideas from one linguistic context into another, a practice that is valued for the access it provides to foreign knowledge rather than for any intrinsic cultural significance it may possess. This understanding of translation treats it as a neutral medium, as

transparent as the glass through which one looks at a landscape, which ideally does not itself distort or color what it conveys.

But this understanding is inadequate, and the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has implicitly and sometimes explicitly challenged it. Translation is not a neutral medium. It is an active cultural practice in which choices about what to translate, how to translate it, what linguistic resources of the target language to deploy in the rendering of the source text, and what relationship to establish between the cultural context of the original and the cultural context of the translation, are all choices with cultural and political significance. The history of translation in colonial and postcolonial contexts is full of examples of translations that have been used as instruments of cultural domination, that have imposed colonial frameworks on indigenous texts or that have represented indigenous cultures to metropolitan audiences in ways that served colonial interests rather than the genuine interests of the colonized.

The translation practice of Sofa and Khan is not of this kind. Their translations are motivated by a specific cultural project: the project of enriching Bengali intellectual and cultural life by making available, in Bengali, works that have been produced in other linguistic and cultural traditions and that can contribute to the development of a more sophisticated and more capacious Bengali culture than would be possible if Bengali thinkers were limited to the resources of the Bengali tradition alone. This is a translation practice in the service of cultural development rather than cultural domination.

42.2 Sofa's Translation of Goethe: A Twelve-Year Labor

The most ambitious translation project in the tradition's history is Sofa's translation of Goethe's *Faust* into Bengali, a project that occupied twelve years of his life and that represented an extraordinary commitment of intellectual and artistic energy. The choice of *Faust* as a translation project is itself philosophically significant. *Faust* is one of the central texts of European intellectual culture: a meditation on the Faustian bargain, the individual's desire for unlimited knowledge and unlimited experience, the consequences of that desire, and the question of whether redemption is possible for a being who has sought to exceed the limits imposed on human life.

For Sofa, the Faustian theme was not merely a European preoccupation. It connected directly to his understanding of the condition of the Bengali Muslim intellectual in postcolonial Bangladesh: the intellectual who desires a modernity that promises unlimited development and liberation but who discovers that the specific forms of modernity available to postcolonial societies involve bargains with colonial and neocolonial powers that compromise the very liberation they promise. The Faustian structure of desire and consequence, translated into Bengali, became a way of illuminating the specific situation of the Bangladeshi intellectual from within the resources of European literature, without simply accepting European literature's own self-understanding of its significance.

Sofa's Goethe translation was received with considerable admiration in Bangladeshi literary circles, and it earned him a fellowship in Germany, which he attended in 1986 but from which he returned without completing the fellowship period. This return, reminiscent of Razzaq's return

from London after Laski's death, is characteristic of the tradition's complex relationship with metropolitan intellectual culture: drawing on it for specific purposes but refusing to be fully absorbed into it, maintaining a Bengali and Bangladeshi specificity that the metropolitan intellectual world does not fully recognize or accommodate.

42.3 Khan's Translations: Building a Bengali Theoretical Library

Khan's translation practice has been organized around a specific intellectual project: the creation of a Bengali-language library of theoretical texts that would make the major works of Western critical theory available to readers who read Bengali but not the European languages in which those works were originally composed. His translations of Plato, Frantz Fanon, Charles Baudelaire, and Dorothee Solle into Bengali represent a sustained effort to enrich the theoretical resources available to Bengali intellectual culture without simply importing those resources wholesale but rather critically engaging with them and making them available for the specific work of Bangladeshi cultural and political analysis.

The translation of Fanon into Bengali is particularly significant for the tradition's cultural project. Fanon's work on colonialism and its psychic consequences, developed in the context of the French colonization of Algeria and of African colonization more broadly, provides theoretical resources for understanding the specific psychic and cultural dimensions of colonial experience that have direct relevance to the Bangladeshi situation even though the specific historical circumstances are very different. Khan's translation of Fanon makes these resources available to Bengali readers who can engage with them in their own language and apply them to their own specific conditions, without requiring the mediation of English or French as languages of access.

Khan translated the works of Plato, James Rennell, Charles Baudelaire, Frantz Fanon, Dorothee Solle into Bengali. [Tritiyomatra](#) Each of these translation choices reflects a specific dimension of the tradition's cultural project. Plato brings the resources of philosophical dialogue to Bengali readers; Rennell, the eighteenth-century geographer whose work documented Bengal's physical and human geography, brings a crucial historical document of early colonial knowledge production; Baudelaire brings the resources of European literary modernism; Fanon brings the resources of anti-colonial theory; and Solle brings a dimension of critical theology that connects to the tradition's engagement with the relationship between religious tradition and political commitment.

42.4 The Problem of Equivalence: What Translates and What Does Not

Any sustained engagement with the translation practice of Sofa and Khan must confront the question of what translates and what does not, the question of which aspects of a text or a theoretical framework can be rendered in Bengali without loss and which aspects are so deeply embedded in the specific linguistic and cultural context of their original that translation necessarily involves transformation rather than mere reproduction.

This question is not merely a technical question for the professional translator. In the context of the tradition's broader cultural project, it is a philosophical question about the relationship between universal and particular in cultural life, about the degree to which the insights of human

thought transcend the specific linguistic and cultural conditions of their production, and about what it means for a genuinely global intellectual culture to be possible.

Khan's position on this question, developed in scattered theoretical comments across his essays rather than in a systematic account, is one that insists on both the possibility and the necessary transformation of translation. Ideas can travel across linguistic and cultural borders; the great works of human thought are not so completely embedded in their original linguistic contexts that they can say nothing meaningful to readers from other contexts. But the travel involves transformation: what arrives at the destination is not identical to what departed from the source, because the new linguistic and cultural context provides a different set of resonances, associations, and frameworks for understanding that changes what the text means even when the words are as faithfully rendered as possible.

This is not a problem to be solved but a condition to be acknowledged and worked with. The enrichment of Bengali intellectual culture through translation is genuine, even if the translations necessarily transform their originals. And the transformation is not necessarily a loss; it can be a gain, as the original text, placed in a new context, reveals dimensions of its meaning that were not visible in its original context because the new context brings different questions and different frameworks that allow different aspects of the text to become significant.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE: CULTURAL CONTROVERSIES AND THE BATTLES THAT DEFINED A TRADITION

Disputed Legacies, Institutional Conflicts, and the Social Dynamics of Intellectual Dissent

43.1 The Nature of Intellectual Controversy

The intellectual tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has been, from its origins, a tradition that generates controversy. This is not a coincidental feature of the tradition but a necessary consequence of its fundamental commitments: the commitment to intellectual honesty about difficult questions, the commitment to challenging established authorities and comfortable assumptions, the commitment to speaking unwelcome truths in contexts where comfortable agreement is easier and more personally rewarding, and the commitment to a standard of intellectual seriousness that is difficult to maintain and easy to fall away from.

Controversy is, in a deep sense, a sign of intellectual health. The intellectual tradition that never generates controversy is either a tradition that has already been absorbed into the consensus of the society it inhabits, in which case it has ceased to challenge that consensus and has become merely its sophisticated articulation, or a tradition that is so marginal to public life that it has no interlocutors to disagree with it. The controversies that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has generated over the decades are therefore not an embarrassment but a testament to its genuine engagement with the questions that matter most in Bangladeshi cultural and political life.

But not all controversies are equally productive. Some controversies are genuine intellectual debates in which the disagreeing parties are each making arguments that advance understanding even as they challenge each other. Other controversies are primarily social conflicts in which intellectual disagreement is the surface expression of underlying conflicts of interest, institutional rivalry, personal antagonism, or political competition. Both kinds of controversy have surrounded the tradition, and distinguishing between them requires attention to the specific dynamics of each case.

43.2 Sofa's *Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas*: The Controversy That Defined a Generation

Sofa's 1972 essay collection *Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas*, the work that more than any other established his reputation as a fearless and uncompromising intellectual, generated the most significant controversy in the early history of the tradition. The essay's central argument, that Bangladeshi intellectuals were characterized by opportunism, political servility, and a systematic failure to exercise genuine critical independence, was experienced by many of those it criticized as a personal attack rather than a structural analysis. The anger it generated was intense and lasting, and it shaped the social dynamics of Dhaka's intellectual community for years after its publication.

Understanding the specific dynamics of this controversy requires attention to the historical moment of the essay's composition. It appeared in 1972, the year immediately following Bangladesh's independence, a moment of extraordinary political and emotional intensity in which the country was simultaneously celebrating its liberation, mourning its catastrophic losses, and attempting to construct the institutions of a new state. The essay's insistence that the intellectual class that had nominally contributed to the liberation struggle was fundamentally characterized by opportunism and servility was experienced by many intellectuals as a betrayal, as an attack on the liberation movement itself at the very moment when that movement's achievement needed to be honored and defended.

Sofa's response to this criticism was uncompromising. He argued that the most profound form of honoring the liberation movement's achievement was to hold the postcolonial reality of Bangladesh to the standard that the liberation movement had articulated, and that intellectual sycophancy in the service of the new political establishment was not a form of honoring the liberation but a betrayal of its promise. This argument was not merely self-defense; it was a principled articulation of what the tradition means by intellectual integrity, and it remains one of the most important statements of that meaning in the tradition's history.

The controversy over *Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas* also illuminated the specific social mechanisms by which intellectual dissent is managed and contained in Bangladeshi cultural life. Sofa was subjected not merely to intellectual criticism but to social ostracism, institutional marginalization, and the various informal sanctions that the cultural mainstream deploys against those who challenge its self-understanding. He lost friendships, was excluded from literary circles, and found his work systematically ignored or dismissed by the dominant cultural institutions. His survival as an independent intellectual depended on a combination of personal toughness, a small circle of genuine intellectual friends and supporters, and the recognition of a younger generation of readers who found in his work the honesty they could not find elsewhere.

43.3 The Meherjaan Controversy: Khan and the Politics of Liberation War Memory

One of the most significant cultural controversies of the recent period in which the tradition has been centrally involved is the controversy over the 2011 film *Meherjaan*, directed by Rubaiyat Hossain. The film, which presented a sympathetic portrayal of a Pakistani soldier during the 1971 Liberation War and explored the possibility of a love relationship between a Bengali woman and a Pakistani military man, generated fierce controversy in Bangladesh. Critics argued that the film was a distortion of historical truth, a romanticization of the perpetrators of genocide, and an insult to the victims of the Liberation War's violence.

In a 2011 debate arranged by bdnews24.com, Khan critiqued the portrayal of the Bangladesh Liberation War in the film *Meherjaan*. Khan criticized the film's representation of 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. [Tritiyomatra](#) Khan's intervention in this controversy was characteristically complex. He was not simply a participant in the mob denunciation of the film, though he was critical of specific aspects of its historical representation. His critique engaged with the question of how the Liberation War should be remembered, what kinds of narrative representations are legitimate and what kinds are distorting, and what the political consequences of different modes of representing 1971 are for the contemporary political culture of Bangladesh.

The controversy is significant for the tradition's cultural analysis because it illustrates the specific dynamics of what might be called the politics of historical memory: the ways in which different social and political forces contest the interpretation of specific historical events, the ways in which those contestations reflect current political conflicts rather than purely historical questions, and the ways in which the cultural forms through which history is represented, in this case film, carry specific affordances and limitations that shape what can be said and how it can be received.

Khan's engagement with the *Meherjaan* controversy was consistent with the tradition's broader analytical approach: acknowledging the genuine complexity of the questions the controversy raised while refusing to reduce that complexity to the binary of heroic defenders versus shameful attackers. The history of the Liberation War is complex, and its artistic representation faces genuine challenges that cannot be resolved by simply endorsing the dominant nationalist narrative or by simply challenging that narrative in the name of some form of revisionism. The tradition's approach requires engaging honestly with that complexity without sacrificing the fundamental commitment to the historical truth of the war's character as a liberation struggle against colonial violence.

43.4 The Farhad Mazhar Question: Intellectual Divergence and Political Boundary

One of the most revealing controversies in the recent history of the tradition is the divergence between Salimullah Khan and Farhad Mazhar, two figures who were for a time regarded as intellectual allies and who have subsequently become, on certain crucial political and cultural questions, genuine antagonists.

Farhad Mazhar is a poet, cultural activist, and political thinker of significant intellectual stature in Bangladesh, whose career has followed a trajectory that overlaps with but ultimately diverges from the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan in important ways. In the earlier phase of his

career, Mazhar shared many of the tradition's commitments: the critique of colonial cultural hierarchies, the insistence on Bengali as the medium of genuine intellectual life, the critique of the Bangladeshi ruling class's detachment from the mass people, and the engagement with the liberation war's unfulfilled promises.

But the divergence between Khan and Mazhar, which became most acute in the context of the Shahbagh Movement of 2013, reflects a genuine difference in political and cultural orientation that goes deeper than the specific political questions over which they disagreed. The Shahbagh Movement, which demanded the death penalty for those convicted of war crimes in the 1971 liberation, was supported by Khan and criticized by Mazhar, whose position in this period was more sympathetic to Islamist political formations than Khan's. In 2013, in the backdrop of the Shahbagh Movement in Dhaka, Salimullah Khan came out in strong support of the movement and criticized Farhad Mazhar's position with regard to the events. [Tritiyomatra](#)

The Khan-Mazhar divergence is instructive for understanding the tradition's commitments because it illustrates what the tradition's framework regards as the boundary between genuine critical independence and political opportunism. From Khan's perspective, Mazhar's shift toward positions more sympathetic to Islamist politics represented precisely the kind of intellectual accommodation to political fashion that Sofa had identified as the central failure of Bangladeshi intellectual life. Whether or not one agrees with this judgment, the controversy illustrates the tradition's insistence that intellectual independence requires the willingness to maintain consistent analytical principles regardless of the political pressures that favor deviation from those principles.

43.5 The Bangla Academy Controversy: Recognition, Humiliation, and Institutional Power

A more recent controversy that illuminates the tradition's relationship with the institutional structures of Bangladeshi cultural life is the controversy surrounding the Bangla Academy Literary Award, the most prestigious official literary award in Bangladesh, and the tradition's complex relationship with it.

The Bangla Academy, as the primary state institution for the promotion of Bengali language and literature in Bangladesh, occupies a position of considerable institutional authority in the cultural life of the country. Its literary awards carry significant prestige and have the power to shape the reception of literary work by providing or withholding official recognition. The tradition's relationship with this institution has been characterized by the same productive tension that characterizes its relationship with all forms of institutional authority: the recognition that institutions of cultural promotion are necessary and can be genuinely valuable, combined with the critical awareness that they are also sites where political and cultural power operates and where genuine intellectual independence is frequently compromised.

In 2025, following the Bangla Academy Literary Award ceremony, Khan complained publicly about what he described as the humiliation of awardees, suggesting that institutional recognition had not brought genuine respect. [Grokopedia](#) This complaint reflects the tradition's persistent concern that official cultural recognition in Bangladesh tends to be a form of co-optation rather than a form of genuine honor: a way of domesticating potentially critical voices by incorporating

them into the official cultural establishment on terms that subordinate intellectual independence to institutional propriety.

The specific dynamics of the 2025 controversy are instructive. Khan's complaint was not that the awards were given to unworthy recipients but that the ceremony itself, the institutional form through which the recognition was expressed, failed to treat the awardees with the genuine respect that their intellectual achievements deserved. This is a subtle but important point: the form of institutional recognition matters as much as the fact of recognition, because a form of recognition that is experienced as condescending or that subordinates the intellectual to the institutional hierarchy reproduces the very cultural dynamics that the tradition has consistently challenged.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR: THE POLITICS OF INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

Life, Character, and the Relationship Between Personal Example and Intellectual Achievement

44.1 The Person and the Work

Intellectual biography raises questions that are not easy to resolve and that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has engaged with in ways that are revealing of the tradition's broader cultural commitments. The question of the relationship between a thinker's life and their work, between their personal character and the intellectual achievements that character enabled or constrained, between the private person and the public intellectual, is one that has no single correct answer but that demands honest engagement.

The dominant tradition of intellectual biography in Western academic culture has tended toward one of two extreme positions. The first is the biographical fallacy, the assumption that understanding the biographical circumstances of a thinker's life provides the key to understanding their intellectual work, that the ideas can be explained by the life and the life can be used as evidence for interpreting the ideas. The second is the anti-biographical position that the work stands independent of its author, that biographical information is irrelevant to intellectual assessment, and that the quality and significance of ideas should be evaluated independently of the personal qualities, the social positions, or the biographical circumstances of the people who produced them.

Both of these extreme positions are inadequate. The tradition's approach, which is most explicitly developed in Sofa's and Khan's critical writings about each other and about Razzaq, holds that the relationship between life and work is genuine but complex, that biographical circumstances do not simply determine intellectual achievements, that the same circumstances can produce very different intellectual responses depending on the specific combination of personal qualities and historical conditions in play, and that understanding the specific ways in which biographical circumstances shaped the intellectual work enriches rather than reduces that work's significance.

44.2 Razzaq's Asceticism and Its Intellectual Significance

The biographical feature of Abdur Razzaq's life that has most consistently attracted commentary is his asceticism: the austere simplicity of his personal life, his indifference to material comfort and social status, his refusal to seek the institutional positions and the social privileges that his intellectual reputation would have entitled him to pursue. Razzaq lived simply, dressed simply, maintained no distinction in his personal conduct between his role as an eminent academic and his role as an ordinary citizen, and refused the various forms of distinction and recognition that were offered to him until late in his life.

This asceticism is not merely a charming biographical detail. It is, in the tradition's analysis, a philosophically significant practice: a way of living that embodies a specific set of values and that has specific consequences for the character of the intellectual work it supports. The intellectual whose material existence is independent of the approval of institutional authorities, whose self-esteem is not dependent on official recognition, and whose daily life does not require the maintenance of a social position that demands constant attention to the opinions of those above him in the institutional hierarchy, is in a structural position of intellectual freedom that is not available to the intellectual whose material existence is organized around the pursuit of institutional status and official recognition.

This structural argument connects to the tradition's broader analysis of intellectual servility. The servility that Sofa diagnosed in the Bangladeshi intellectual class is not merely a character defect of specific individuals; it is a structural tendency that emerges from the specific conditions in which intellectual life is conducted. When the material conditions of intellectual production depend on the approval of those who hold institutional and political power, the intellectual is structurally pressured toward accommodation with those who hold that power. Razzaq's asceticism was, among other things, a practical strategy for maintaining the structural conditions of intellectual independence: by not needing what those with institutional power could give, he was not pressured by what they could withhold.

44.3 Sofa's Bohemianism: Deliberate Marginality as Intellectual Strategy

Sofa's lifestyle was the antithesis of the conventional academic lifestyle. He never married, never maintained a stable domestic arrangement, moved frequently between different living situations, dressed unconventionally, and in general conducted his life in ways that consistently marked him as outside the social mainstream of middle-class Bangladeshi intellectual life. This bohemianism was not simply temperamental; it was, as Khan and others have argued, a deliberate cultivation of a social position that was consistent with the intellectual commitments it embodied.

The biographical parallel that suggests itself most immediately is with Ahmed Sofa's other great inspiration in personal conduct, the painter SM Sultan, the two men who Sofa himself described as perhaps the only two such bohemian figures one could find in a hundred years of Bengali life. Sultan, who deliberately chose to live among the common people of rural Bangladesh rather than in the institutional settings of the urban art world, embodied a practice of cultural commitment that went beyond the production of art objects to include the way of life within which the art was produced. Sofa's own bohemianism can be understood in similar terms: not merely as a personal

preference for unconventional living but as a practice that was consistent with and indeed supportive of the intellectual and cultural commitments that his writing expressed.

The social costs of this bohemianism were significant. Sofa's lifestyle generated condescension and sometimes contempt from the more conventionally respectable members of Dhaka's intellectual class. His refusal to maintain the appearances of middle-class respectability was interpreted by many as irresponsibility, as evidence of personal instability, or as a form of cultural posturing. These responses missed what Sofa's closest admirers, including Khan, have consistently argued is the point: that the deliberate cultivation of marginality, the refusal of the comforts of social respectability, is itself an intellectual and cultural practice that has specific consequences for the kind of thinking that is possible in those conditions.

44.4 Khan's Academic Trajectory and the Problem of Institutional Location

Khan's intellectual biography is shaped by a more complex institutional trajectory than either Razzaq's or Sofa's. He studied law at the University of Dhaka, taught at the University of Rajshahi, went to the United States to study economics at the New School for Social Research, and has subsequently held various academic positions in Bangladesh including the directorship of the Centre for Advanced Theory at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh and his current faculty position at North South University. This trajectory reflects the specific conditions of contemporary Bangladeshi academic life, in which genuine intellectual independence requires navigating institutional structures that are more complex and more globally connected than the structures within which Razzaq and Sofa operated.

The question of Khan's institutional location is not merely a biographical detail. It is a political question that connects to the tradition's broader analysis of intellectual independence and institutional dependence. The private universities in which Khan has primarily held his academic positions are institutions whose character and governance reflect the specific conditions of Bangladeshi higher education in the period of market liberalization: institutions that are dependent on student fees, that are subject to the preferences of their boards of trustees, and that operate in a competitive market for academic credentials and institutional prestige.

The specific tension between institutional location and intellectual independence that Khan's position embodies is one that he has addressed directly in his critical writing about the contemporary conditions of intellectual production in Bangladesh. His argument, consistent with the tradition's broader analysis, is that institutional independence is a precondition for genuine intellectual work but that institutional independence, in the current conditions of Bangladeshi higher education, is increasingly difficult to maintain. The marketization of higher education, the dependence of private universities on student-fee income, and the consequent pressure to provide credentials that the market values rather than education that genuine human development requires, create structural conditions of intellectual compromise that affect the entire academic system, not merely its individual participants.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE: EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE TRADITION'S CULTURAL POLITICS

The School, the University, and the Conditions of Genuine Learning

45.1 Education as the Central Cultural Institution

For all three figures in the tradition, education is the central cultural institution: the primary site where the cultural formations that determine the character of public life are reproduced or challenged, where the intellectual habits and civic capacities that democratic participation requires are cultivated or stunted, and where the colonial inheritance in cultural life is most deeply embedded and most difficult to transform. The tradition's engagement with education is therefore not a peripheral concern but a core dimension of its cultural and political analysis.

The importance that the tradition assigns to education reflects a specific understanding of how cultural change happens. Political change, the transformation of governments and the reform of constitutions, is relatively rapid compared with cultural change, the transformation of the habits, orientations, and values that shape how people relate to each other and to their political institutions. The political upheaval of 2024, which brought down the Hasina government and initiated a process of constitutional reform, was rapid by the standards of political change. But the cultural transformation that the tradition has consistently argued is necessary for genuine democratic development, the development of the habits of political engagement, the norms of civic conduct, and the educational conditions that produce citizens capable of genuine democratic participation, operates on a much longer timescale, and the primary institutional site of that transformation is the educational system.

The tradition's educational philosophy is organized around a distinction that all three figures have articulated in different ways: the distinction between education that genuinely develops human capacities, that enables people to think, to question, to understand, and to act as genuinely autonomous subjects, and education that merely reproduces existing hierarchies and existing forms of compliance, that trains people to perform competence rather than to achieve it, and that produces credentials rather than genuine intellectual development.

45.2 The Language Question in Education: Khan's Constitutional Argument

The most concrete and most politically significant dimension of the tradition's educational philosophy is the argument for Bengali as the medium of education at all levels, from primary school through university, which Khan has developed into a comprehensive educational and constitutional argument.

Khan has highlighted linguistic studies indicating that mother-tongue-based education improves literacy rates and knowledge retention, particularly in early years, as a basis for policy reform. [Grokopedia](#) But Khan's argument goes beyond the empirical claim about learning outcomes to engage with the constitutional and philosophical dimensions of the language-in-education question.

The constitutional argument proceeds from the premise that genuine education, education that develops human capacities rather than merely providing access to credentials, requires that the medium of education be the native language of the students being educated. A child who is taught in a language they do not natively speak is systematically disadvantaged relative to a child taught in their native language: not because they are less intelligent or less capable, but because the cognitive resources that they have developed through their experience of the world are encoded in their native language, and the requirement to process education through a foreign language imposes an additional cognitive burden that reduces the effective quality of the education received.

This argument has direct implications for the equality of educational opportunity. In a system where Bengali-medium education is the norm for the majority of students but English-medium education is available to those who can afford it and is associated with access to the most desirable social and professional positions, the choice of medium of education is not a neutral educational choice but a critical determinant of social position. The families who can provide their children with English-medium education are securing for those children a significant advantage in the competition for the social positions that English proficiency opens. And the families who cannot afford English-medium education are consigning their children to a systematic disadvantage that begins in the classroom and extends throughout their professional and social lives.

Khan has criticized the marginalization of Bengali-medium institutions, noting their relegation to second- or third-tier status amid the rise of English-medium alternatives. On April 12, 2025, he lamented this trend, linking it to systemic devaluation that hinders equitable access to civil service examinations like the BCS, where Bengali-medium graduates compete at a disadvantage. [Grokopedia](#)

This is a straightforward equity argument: a system that systematically advantages children from wealthy families at the expense of children from poorer families is a system that violates the constitutional commitment to equality of opportunity that Bangladesh has formally endorsed. But for Khan, the equity argument is compounded by the colonial critique: the English-Bengali educational hierarchy does not merely produce inequality in terms of life outcomes; it produces a specific cultural hierarchy in which English speakers are systematically positioned as more sophisticated, more modern, and more intellectually serious than Bengali speakers, regardless of the actual intellectual content of what they are saying. This is the colonial legacy in its most intimate and most damaging form: the reproduction, at the level of individual self-understanding, of the colonial hierarchy's claim that the colonized are inherently inferior to the colonizers.

45.3 The University in the Tradition's Analysis: From Ideal to Institution

The university, as the highest institutional expression of the ideal of organized intellectual inquiry, occupies a central and contested place in the tradition's cultural analysis. The ideal of the university, as a community of scholars committed to the disinterested pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of that knowledge to the next generation, is one that all three figures take seriously; it provides the normative standard against which the actual functioning of Bangladeshi universities can be evaluated and found wanting. But the actual functioning of Bangladeshi

universities, as Sofa's Gabhi Bittanta made unforgettably clear, departs from this ideal in ways that the tradition has documented and analyzed with considerable precision.

The specific failures of the Bangladeshi university system that the tradition has identified fall into several categories. The first is the failure of intellectual independence: the degree to which university faculty are subject to political pressure, whether from the government, from political parties, or from the specific patron-client networks that connect the university to the broader political system. Sofa's analysis of the politics of university life in Gabhi Bittanta identified the ways in which political affiliation rather than intellectual merit determines career advancement, institutional resources, and administrative positions in the Bangladeshi university system, and this analysis has been amply confirmed by subsequent events.

The second is the failure of genuine educational engagement: the degree to which university teaching in Bangladesh is organized around the transfer of information that can be reproduced in examinations rather than around the cultivation of the habits of thought, the analytical capacities, and the intellectual independence that genuine higher education requires. This failure is partly structural, the result of class sizes, assessment systems, and institutional incentives that reward information retention over genuine intellectual development, and partly cultural, the result of educational traditions that position the teacher as an authority to be reproduced rather than a guide to be argued with.

The third is the failure of research: the degree to which the Bangladeshi university system produces genuinely original knowledge about Bangladesh and about the world rather than importing frameworks and conclusions developed in metropolitan academic systems. Razzaq's understanding of the relationship between genuine education and genuine inquiry, his insistence that teaching and learning at the highest level require the continuous production of new knowledge rather than the mere transmission of established knowledge, is directly relevant to this failure. A university system that produces few genuinely original contributions to any field of human knowledge is not a university system in the full sense; it is an educational institution that performs the appearance of higher education without achieving its substance.

45.4 Primary Education and the Conditions of Democratic Citizenship

The tradition's educational philosophy is not confined to the university. All three figures have recognized that the foundations of the intellectual culture and the civic capacities that democratic life requires are laid in the primary years of education, and that the failures of the Bangladeshi primary educational system are in some respects even more consequential than the failures of the university system, because they affect a far larger proportion of the population and because the intellectual habits cultivated or stunted in the early years of education are far more difficult to transform later.

Khan has argued that priority should have been building schools rather than infrastructure projects, and that reform is most needed at the primary and secondary education levels. He has noted that the current education policy was established in 1854 by the British, with the core idea that if someone took the initiative to establish a school, the government would provide a grant, a colonial framework that has not been fundamentally reformed. [Views Bangladesh](#)

This observation points to a structural continuity between the colonial educational system and the postcolonial system that is deeply significant for the tradition's analysis. The Bangladeshi primary educational system, despite decades of formal independence, has not undergone the fundamental transformation that genuine educational reform would require. It continues to operate in institutional forms that were designed for a colonial purpose, forms that were intended not to develop the intellectual capacities of the mass of the population but to produce a small class of semi-educated intermediaries and to keep the mass population in a condition of cultural and intellectual dependence that served colonial economic interests.

The political consequences of this educational inheritance are significant. A population whose primary education has not equipped them with the intellectual tools for critical analysis, for the evaluation of competing political claims, for the understanding of their rights as citizens and the mechanisms through which those rights can be exercised, is a population that is vulnerable to political manipulation, that is more susceptible to patron-client political mobilization than to programmatic political engagement, and that is less capable of holding political authorities accountable to democratic standards than a better-educated population would be. The educational failure is therefore not merely a cultural problem; it is a democratic problem, one of the deep structural conditions that the tradition has consistently identified as an obstacle to genuine constitutional democracy in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX: THE INTELLECTUAL TRADITION AND GENDER

A Critical Lacuna and Its Political Significance

46.1 The Problem of Absence

One of the most significant and most frequently noted limitations of the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is its failure to fully develop the gender dimension of its cultural and political analysis. All three figures have made statements about gender equality, about the importance of women's education and women's participation in public life, and about the relationship between gender relations and the broader project of cultural transformation that the tradition consistently advocates. But none of them has developed a sustained and systematic analysis of gender as a dimension of the specific cultural and political conditions they are analyzing, and the limitations of the tradition's gender analysis have significant consequences for the comprehensiveness and the adequacy of its cultural framework.

This absence is particularly striking in the case of Sofa, whose essay *Bangali Musalmaner Man* is concerned with the formation of Bengali Muslim identity but pays relatively little sustained attention to the gender dimension of that formation: the specific ways in which Bengali Muslim women's experience of history has differed from men's, the specific forms of cultural production that women have contributed to the Bengali Muslim tradition, and the specific dimensions of the colonial experience and the postcolonial inheritance that are gendered in ways that a purely masculine perspective cannot adequately capture.

46.2 Gender and the Colonial Inheritance: What the Tradition Misses

The tradition's framework for analyzing the colonial inheritance in Bangladeshi cultural life is comprehensive in many respects but incomplete in its treatment of gender. The colonial educational system that the tradition analyzes was not gender-neutral in its effects: it systematically excluded women from the educational opportunities that it provided to men, and the consequences of this exclusion for the formation of Bengali culture, for the character of intellectual life, and for the possibilities of political participation, were profound and have not been fully overcome in the postcolonial period.

The specific figure of Begum Rokeya (Roquia Sakhawat Hussain), whom Khan has written about and whom the tradition acknowledges as a genuinely significant figure in Bengali Muslim intellectual history, provides an important reference point for understanding what a gender-attentive analysis of Bengali Muslim cultural formation would look like. Begum Rokeya, writing in the early twentieth century, developed a critique of the gender relations of Bengali Muslim society that was simultaneously more radical than anything that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has produced on this question, and more grounded in the specific conditions of Bengali Muslim women's experience. Her critique of purdah, her advocacy for women's education, and her satirical vision of a feminist utopia in *Sultana's Dream* all represent dimensions of the Bengali Muslim intellectual tradition that the male-dominated tradition we are studying has not fully assimilated.

The failure to fully integrate Begum Rokeya's work and the feminist critique of Bengali Muslim patriarchy that it represents is a genuine limitation of the tradition, not a minor gap that can be filled with a few supplementary comments. It reflects the specific social position of all three figures, who are men formed in a social context that systematically privileged male intellectual production and that did not require them to confront the gender dimensions of the cultural and political conditions they were analyzing in the same way that women intellectuals in the same context would have been required to confront them.

46.3 Recent Developments: Feminist Engagement with the Tradition

The past decade has seen a growing body of feminist scholarship that engages critically with the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, both drawing on its resources and challenging its limitations. This scholarship, produced primarily by younger Bangladeshi academics and by scholars in the Bangladeshi diaspora, is attempting to develop the gender dimension of the tradition's cultural analysis that the tradition itself has not fully provided.

A recent Routledge volume on Bangladesh in Anglophone and vernacular literature has opened new critical conversations about the gendered dimensions of Bangladeshi cultural history, setting Bengali critical and literary texts in dialogue with Anglophone literatures in ways that illuminate the cross-border entanglements of cultural politics in ways the tradition has not fully explored. This scholarship is valuable not merely as a correction of the tradition's limitations but as a development of its productive insights in directions that the tradition itself opened but did not fully pursue.

The feminist engagement with Sofa's work has been particularly illuminating. Sofa's literary representations of women characters have been read both as evidence of his genuine attempt to engage with the full complexity of Bengali Muslim social life and as evidence of the specific limitations of a male perspective that, even at its most sympathetic, cannot fully inhabit the experience it is representing. The gap between Sofa's sympathetic intent and his actual literary practice, in the representation of women characters, is itself evidence of the structural conditions that the feminist critique of the tradition identifies: the conditions in which even the most critically aware male intellectual remains partially blind to dimensions of social reality that are most immediately and most directly experienced by women.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN: CULTURAL MEMORY AND THE POLITICS OF FORGETTING

1971 in Literature, Film, and the Contested Terrain of National Memory

47.1 The Production and Politics of Historical Memory

Every nation produces a version of its own history that serves specific political and cultural purposes, that emphasizes some aspects of the historical record and suppresses others, and that constructs a narrative of national identity from the raw materials of actual events according to specific interpretive principles. Bangladesh is no exception to this general principle, and the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has been consistently engaged with the politics of Bangladeshi historical memory: with the ways in which the history of 1971, the liberation war and its antecedents, has been remembered, narrated, contested, and instrumentalized in the service of competing political projects.

The liberation war of 1971 is the founding event of Bangladeshi national identity, the event that the national narrative positions as the decisive break between the colonial and postcolonial periods, the moment when Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation capable of determining its own political fate. The political significance of this founding event means that its interpretation is not merely a historical question; it is a question of profound political import whose answers shape the legitimacy of political actors, the boundaries of acceptable political discourse, and the cultural framework within which political life is conducted.

The tradition's engagement with the politics of 1971 memory has several dimensions. Razzaq's direct personal experience of the war's violence, including his escape from the Pakistani military that came to arrest him, gave him a specific relationship to the war that combined personal immediacy with analytical perspective. Sofa's literary engagement with the war, most notably in *Omkar*, provided a fictional account that honored the liberation struggle while refusing the consolations of heroic narrative. And Khan's theoretical analysis of the liberation war, in which he argues that the three fundamental principles of the war, equality, human dignity, and social justice, constitute the founding normative commitments of the Bangladeshi state, provides the most systematic account of what the liberation war means for the political and constitutional obligations of contemporary Bangladesh.

47.2 The Instrumentalization of 1971 Memory: A Critical Analysis

The tradition's most important critical contribution to the politics of historical memory is its consistent identification of the instrumentalization of 1971 memory for partisan political purposes. The liberation war's founding significance has made the claim to represent its authentic legacy an enormously powerful political resource, and every major political force in Bangladesh's history has sought to capture that resource for its own purposes.

The Awami League, as the party most directly associated with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the formal declaration of independence, has consistently claimed the liberation war's legacy as its own political property, using the language of 1971 and the invocation of the war's martyrs to legitimate its political authority and to delegitimize opposition. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party, founded by Ziaur Rahman, who was himself a liberation war commander, has contested this claim, offering a different narrative of the war that emphasizes the military dimension of the liberation struggle at the expense of its political and ideological dimensions. Islamist political forces have offered yet another narrative, one that downplays or denies the secular nationalist dimensions of the liberation struggle and emphasizes the Islamic character of the Bangladeshi state.

The tradition's analytical framework refuses to endorse any of these partisan appropriations of the liberation war's legacy. Its insistence on the three principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice as the war's founding commitments provides a normative standard that is not the exclusive property of any political party and that can be used to evaluate all political formations, including those that claim the liberation war's legacy most loudly. From the tradition's perspective, the authentic legacy of 1971 is not a political party or a political leader but a set of values and commitments that the actual conduct of political life must be measured against, regardless of the political identity of those who are doing the measuring.

47.3 Film, Literature, and the Representation of 1971

The specific ways in which the liberation war has been represented in Bengali literature and cinema have been a site of ongoing cultural controversy in which the tradition has been consistently engaged. The dominant mode of representing 1971 in both literary and cinematic form has tended toward heroic nationalism: a narrative in which the liberation struggle is portrayed as an unambiguous story of heroism and sacrifice against clear villains, in which the complexity of the actual historical situation is simplified in the interest of emotional clarity and political solidarity.

The tradition's critique of this dominant mode is not a critique of the liberation struggle's genuine significance or of the genuine heroism of those who fought in it. It is a critique of the ways in which heroic nationalist narrative tends to occlude the complexity of the historical situation, to paper over the internal contradictions of the liberation movement, and to prevent the kind of honest historical engagement that the tradition's framework demands. Sofa's *Omkar* was, among other things, a literary intervention against the tendency of post-liberation narratives to transform the complex reality of the war and its aftermath into a simple story of heroic liberation and uncomplicated independence.

The Meherjaan controversy, discussed in an earlier chapter, illustrates the specific social and political dynamics of this issue with particular clarity. The intense reaction against a film that attempted to represent the liberation war from a perspective that complicated the dominant nationalist narrative suggests the degree to which the politics of historical memory in Bangladesh is organized around a kind of sacred narrative that is experienced as violable rather than as a historical account that is open to critical examination and revision. The tradition's analytical framework, which insists on intellectual honesty about the complexity of historical reality, is in fundamental tension with this sacred narrative quality of 1971 memory, and the tension is productive precisely because it creates the conditions for the genuine historical understanding that the sacralization of memory tends to prevent.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT: THE TRADITION AND THE LITERARY ESTABLISHMENT

Canon, Institutions, and the Sociology of Cultural Authority

48.1 What a Literary Establishment Is and How It Works

A literary establishment, in the sociological sense that the tradition's analytical framework implies, is not merely an informal group of writers and critics who share aesthetic preferences and social connections. It is an institutional complex that includes literary journals, publishing houses, prize committees, university literature departments, state cultural institutions, and the informal social networks that connect all of these into a functioning system of cultural production and evaluation. This institutional complex has specific social dynamics: it tends to reproduce its own membership, to reward those who conform to its aesthetic and social norms, to marginalize those who deviate from those norms, and to treat its own judgments as natural and universal rather than as the expressions of specific social interests and specific cultural investments.

Bangladesh's literary establishment has functioned in broadly these terms, and the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has had a complex and often contentious relationship with it. Sofa, whose work challenged both the aesthetic norms and the social conventions of the Bangladeshi literary mainstream, was for much of his life a figure who occupied a position at the margins of the literary establishment while exercising an influence far beyond what his marginal institutional position would suggest. The paradox of Sofa's reception, simultaneously celebrated as one of the most important writers in Bangladeshi literary history and excluded from the institutional mainstream that would have given formal expression to that recognition, illustrates the specific dynamics of how literary establishments manage figures whose work cannot be easily domesticated.

48.2 The Bangla Academy and the Politics of Cultural Recognition

The Bangla Academy, established in 1955 and reorganized as a state institution in independent Bangladesh, is the central institutional site of official cultural recognition in Bangladesh. Its

activities include the organization of the Ekushey Book Fair, the largest book fair in Bangladesh and one of the most important cultural events in the country's annual calendar, the publication of literary works, the conduct of linguistic research, and the award of literary prizes that carry significant social and cultural prestige.

The tradition's relationship with the Bangla Academy has been marked by the same productive tension that characterizes its relationship with all state cultural institutions. The Academy has, at various points, been aligned with different political formations, reflecting the political changes that have transformed Bangladesh's institutional landscape over the past five decades. Its literary prizes have sometimes been awarded on grounds that reflect genuine literary merit and sometimes on grounds that reflect political alignment or social connection rather than aesthetic achievement. Its institutional culture has been shaped by the specific dynamics of Bangladeshi state institutions generally: susceptible to political pressure, inclined toward conventionality rather than genuine literary innovation, and often more concerned with managing the social dynamics of the literary establishment than with genuinely advancing the cause of Bengali literary culture.

Khan's 2025 complaint about the humiliation of awardees at the Bangla Academy Literary Award ceremony, referenced earlier, must be understood in this context. It reflects not merely a specific grievance about a specific ceremony but a longstanding analysis of the Bangla Academy as an institution whose official functions of cultural recognition and promotion are systematically undermined by the specific social and political dynamics of its institutional culture. An institution that humiliates those it is supposed to honor is not merely being organizationally incompetent; it is revealing something specific about its understanding of the relationship between official recognition and genuine intellectual achievement, and that revelation is consistent with the tradition's broader analysis of how state cultural institutions function in Bangladesh.

48.3 The Ekushey Book Fair and the Politics of Mass Cultural Participation

One dimension of Bangladeshi cultural life that the tradition's analysis has engaged with somewhat differently from its treatment of elite institutional culture is the Ekushey Book Fair, the annual book fair held at the Bangla Academy grounds during the month of February to mark the anniversary of the Language Movement of 1952. The fair has become one of the most significant cultural events in Bangladeshi public life, drawing enormous crowds and serving as the primary occasion for the publication and launch of new books in Bangladesh.

The significance of the Ekushey Book Fair for the tradition's cultural analysis lies in its ambivalence. On the one hand, the fair represents a genuine mass cultural engagement with Bengali literature that is, in its scale and its popular enthusiasm, a remarkable cultural phenomenon. The enormous crowds that attend the fair every year, the intense interest in new publications that it generates, and the democratic character of a cultural event that is attended by people from every social class, suggest that the claim of the tradition's elitist critics that genuinely challenging intellectual work has no audience among ordinary Bangladeshis is simply false.

On the other hand, the fair also illustrates some of the characteristic dynamics of Bangladeshi cultural life that the tradition has consistently criticized. The commercial pressures of the fair, which rewards books that sell quickly over the month of February rather than books that are read carefully over years, tend to favor certain kinds of publication over others: the popular, the conventional, the emotionally accessible, and the politically comfortable over the demanding, the innovative, the analytically rigorous, and the politically challenging. Sofa's work, which requires sustained and careful reading rather than quick consumption, and which offers discomfort rather than entertainment, is not naturally suited to the Ekushey market, and the failure of genuinely demanding work to find a mass audience in the fair's commercial environment is a specific illustration of the broader tension between genuine cultural quality and mass cultural consumption that the tradition's cultural analysis has consistently engaged with.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE: THE TRADITION IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL CULTURE

Social Media, Intellectual Discourse, and the Transformation of the Public Sphere

49.1 The Digital Public Sphere and Its Discontents

The emergence of digital communication technologies, and particularly the rise of social media platforms as central sites of public discourse in Bangladesh over the past decade and a half, has created conditions for intellectual life and public discussion that are significantly different from the conditions in which the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan was formed. Understanding how the tradition relates to these new conditions is both practically important for assessing the tradition's contemporary relevance and theoretically illuminating for understanding the tradition's own analytical framework more precisely.

The digital public sphere in Bangladesh, like digital public spheres everywhere, has both expanded and transformed the conditions of intellectual discourse. It has expanded them by providing platforms for intellectual communication that are not controlled by the institutional gatekeepers of the traditional literary and academic establishment: anyone with a smartphone and an internet connection can publish their thoughts to a potentially large audience, engage in public debate with people they would never meet in person, and access a vastly greater range of intellectual material than was available through the traditional channels of books, journals, and newspapers.

But the transformation is more complex than simple expansion. The specific affordances of social media platforms, their characteristic rhythms of rapid exchange, their tendency to reward emotional intensity over analytical depth, their susceptibility to the dynamics of viral propagation that amplify the extreme and the provocative at the expense of the careful and the nuanced, and their organization around the metrics of engagement rather than the standards of intellectual quality, create conditions that are in fundamental tension with the kind of intellectual work that the tradition has consistently valued and practiced.

49.2 Khan's Engagement with Digital Media: Television and the New Public Intellectual

Khan's consistent engagement as a guest on Bangladesh's numerous television talk shows represents the most significant adaptation of the tradition's intellectual practice to the new conditions of digital media culture. Khan is one of the most prominent intellectual figures on Bangladeshi television, appearing regularly on programs that discuss political, cultural, and philosophical questions for mass audiences. This engagement with the mass media dimension of digital culture is consistent with the tradition's commitment to public intellectual work rather than purely academic writing, but it also raises specific questions about the relationship between the character of intellectual discourse and the conditions of its production.

The television talk show format has specific constraints that are different from the constraints of either the academic seminar, which was Razzaq's primary medium, or the written essay and novel, which were Sofa's primary media. Television discussion is rapid, competitive, and organized around the production of quotable moments that can be disseminated through social media. It rewards clarity and confidence over nuance and qualification. It tends to reduce complex analytical arguments to memorable formulations that can be received by mass audiences without the sustained attention that genuine argument requires. And it creates dynamics of celebrity intellectualism in which the personality of the intellectual becomes the primary currency of public recognition rather than the quality of their analytical contributions.

Khan has navigated these constraints with considerable skill, using his television appearances to introduce ideas and analytical frameworks to audiences who would not otherwise encounter them, to connect current events to the longer historical and theoretical analysis that the tradition's framework provides, and to model a form of intellectual engagement that is simultaneously accessible and genuinely substantive. But the tensions are real, and they illustrate a specific challenge for the tradition in the current cultural environment: how to maintain the analytical depth and the intellectual integrity that the tradition demands while engaging with the mass media conditions that shape the public intellectual landscape.

49.3 Social Media and the Democratization of Intellectual Discourse

The rise of social media has created something that the tradition has consistently advocated for in principle but whose actual realization raises complex questions: a more democratized intellectual discourse, in which contributions to cultural and political debate are not limited to those who have access to conventional institutional platforms. Bengali-language social media, particularly Facebook, which is by far the dominant platform in Bangladesh, has become a space where intellectual discussions of considerable seriousness take place alongside the social dynamics that characterize social media everywhere.

The democratization of intellectual discourse that social media has partially enabled is, from the tradition's perspective, genuinely valuable. The tradition has consistently argued against the monopolization of legitimate intellectual production by narrow institutional elites, and the expansion of who can participate in public intellectual discourse is consistent with the tradition's democratic commitments. But democratization has its specific complications. The conditions of social media discourse, its rapidity, its emotionality, its susceptibility to misinformation, and its tendency toward tribal rather than genuinely deliberative dynamics, create specific risks for the

kind of careful, evidence-based, analytically rigorous intellectual engagement that the tradition has always valued.

The specific risk that the tradition's analytical framework identifies as most serious is the risk of the simulation of intellectual engagement replacing genuine intellectual engagement. This is a risk that Sofa identified in the Bangladeshi intellectual class of the 1970s, and it is a risk that the specific conditions of social media culture intensify rather than reduce. Social media provides conditions in which it is easier than ever to perform intellectual engagement, to produce the appearance of critical thinking, to signal membership in an intellectual community, without actually doing the sustained analytical work that genuine critical engagement requires. The distinction between genuine and simulated intellectual engagement, which the tradition has always insisted on, has not become less important in the digital age; it has become more important and more difficult to maintain.

CHAPTER FIFTY: THE TRADITION'S CULTURAL LEGACY AND ITS FUTURES

What Has Been Achieved, What Remains to Be Done, and How the Work Continues

50.1 Assessing the Cultural Achievement

Surveying the full extent of the tradition's engagement with cultural questions, as this Part has attempted to do, one is struck by both the extraordinary breadth and depth of what has been achieved and the genuine limitations that remain. The achievement includes: Sofa's literary work, which represents some of the finest fiction and the most important non-fiction writing in Bangladeshi literary history; the tradition's sustained and serious engagement with the question of Bengali Muslim identity, which has provided the most honest and most analytically rigorous framework available for thinking about this question; the tradition's critique of the Bangladeshi intellectual class, which has provided a standard of intellectual integrity that continues to serve as a reference point for the evaluation of intellectual practice; Khan's theoretical synthesis, which has brought the resources of the most sophisticated contemporary critical theory to bear on specifically Bangladeshi conditions in ways that have generated genuinely original insights; and the tradition's contribution to the cultural politics of language, education, and literary canon formation, which has consistently advocated for positions that are both intellectually defensible and politically important.

The limitations include: the inadequate treatment of gender, which has been noted and which represents a genuine analytical gap that the tradition has not yet fully addressed; the sometimes overly male-centric and Dhaka-centric perspective that shapes even the most ambitious analyses of Bengali cultural life; the relative neglect of popular cultural forms, folk literature, and the indigenous intellectual traditions of Bengali Muslim life that exist outside the formal academic and literary channels that the tradition has primarily engaged with; and the tension between the tradition's commitment to Bengali as the medium of genuine intellectual life and the increasingly global conditions of intellectual production and exchange that create pressures toward English as the language of international scholarly communication.

50.2 The Next Generation: Who Carries the Tradition Forward

The question of how the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan will be carried forward by subsequent generations of Bangladeshi intellectuals is both practically important and analytically revealing. The tradition is not a closed system with a fixed membership; it is a living intellectual practice that is defined by its commitments and its methods rather than by its specific personnel. Whether specific individuals who are influenced by or claim to continue the tradition are actually doing so is a question that can only be answered by evaluating the quality and the integrity of their intellectual work rather than their biographical connections to the tradition's founding figures.

The evidence available in 2026 suggests a mixed picture. There is a substantial community of younger Bangladeshi intellectuals who have been genuinely shaped by the tradition's analytical frameworks and its intellectual commitments, and whose work applies those frameworks and maintains those commitments in ways that represent genuine continuations of the tradition. There is also a larger community of intellectuals who claim the tradition's prestige without fully accepting its intellectual demands: who cite Sofa and Khan as authorities while engaging in exactly the forms of intellectual opportunism and political servility that the tradition has consistently condemned.

The test that the tradition applies to its own continuation is ultimately the same test it applies to intellectual practice generally: the test of intellectual honesty, analytical rigor, political independence, and genuine commitment to the values of equality, human dignity, and social justice that the tradition has always articulated. A tradition that is continued in name but abandoned in substance is not continued at all; it is simply another instance of the cultural simulation that the tradition has always opposed.

50.3 The Cultural Tradition and the Constitutional Moment

The cultural analysis that this Part has developed connects directly to the constitutional analysis of Part Four in ways that are worth making explicit. The constitutional reform agenda of 2024-2026 is not merely an institutional and legal project; it is also a cultural project, in the sense that the conditions for its success or failure are fundamentally cultural conditions rather than merely legal or institutional ones.

A constitutional system can function only if the cultural conditions for constitutional governance are present: the habits of political engagement, the norms of civic conduct, the educational conditions that produce citizens capable of genuine democratic participation, and the intellectual culture that is capable of the honest analysis and the independent judgment that constitutional accountability requires. These cultural conditions cannot be created by constitutional amendment or by institutional reform; they can only be created through the long-term cultural transformation that the tradition has consistently identified as the deepest challenge facing Bangladesh.

The tradition's cultural project, as this Part has documented it, is therefore not separable from the constitutional project. The development of a genuine culture of reading and intellectual engagement, the reform of educational institutions to produce genuine critical capacities rather

than mere credential acquisition, the cultivation of a public intellectual discourse that maintains the standards of honesty and rigor that genuine analysis requires, and the development of the cultural conditions in which the Bengali language can be a fully adequate medium for the highest levels of intellectual and political life, are all necessary conditions for the constitutional democracy that the tradition has consistently advocated.

This is the deepest message of the tradition's cultural legacy: that political transformation, however genuinely revolutionary, cannot by itself produce the cultural transformation that genuine democratic governance requires. The work of genuine cultural transformation is the work of generations, and it is the work in which the intellectual tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has been engaged across the span of more than seven decades. The tradition's continuation, in the specific conditions of Bangladesh in 2026, is not merely a matter of historical preservation or academic commemoration. It is a practical necessity for the project of democratic and cultural development that the tradition has always understood as its ultimate purpose.

SUMMARY OF PART FIVE

Part Five has conducted the most sustained cultural analysis yet of the intellectual tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, examining the tradition's engagement with the full range of cultural questions that its analytical framework addresses: language and the politics of Bengali as a medium of intellectual life; literature as a social document and a form of political practice; the contested question of Bengali Muslim identity and its historical formation; the sociology of the intellectual class and its specific failures and achievements; the tradition's engagement with the major figures of Bengali literary history, including the ambivalent relationship to Tagore and the passionate endorsement of Nazrul; the politics of translation and the practice of cultural exchange across linguistic borders; the specific controversies that have defined and tested the tradition's commitments; the educational philosophy that the tradition has developed and the specific institutional conditions it has analyzed; and the tradition's relationship with the new conditions of digital cultural life.

The central analytical finding of Part Five is that the tradition's cultural analysis is not separable from its political analysis but is its necessary complement and foundation. The political democracy that the tradition advocates can only be achieved and sustained in the cultural conditions that the tradition has consistently worked to create: conditions of genuine intellectual independence, honest critical engagement, educational adequacy, linguistic justice, and cultural creativity that the specific inheritance of colonial domination and postcolonial institutional inadequacy has consistently and systematically prevented. The tradition's cultural project is therefore the deepest dimension of its political project, the dimension without which the political reforms, constitutional amendments, and institutional changes that the tradition also advocates would remain, in Sofa's terms, *behāt biplab*, a misdirected revolution that transforms the surface while leaving the depths undisturbed.

Part Six will address the Islamic dimension of the tradition's analytical framework, examining the relationship between Islam, secularism, and the politics of religious identity in Bangladesh as

the tradition has engaged with it, and the specific ways in which the tradition's engagement with Islamic thought and Islamic political movements has generated both insights and controversies that are of continuing relevance to the Bangladesh of 2026.

End of Part Five

PART SIX: ISLAM, SECULARISM, AND THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

The Tradition's Engagement with Islamic Thought, the Secular-Religious Binary, the Sufi Heritage of Bengal, the Politics of Madrasa Education, Communalism, and the Contested Religious Landscape of Post-2024 Bangladesh

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE: THE PROBLEM OF RELIGION IN THE TRADITION'S INTELLECTUAL FRAMEWORK

Neither Dismissal Nor Submission: A Third Path Through a Contested Terrain

51.1 The Opening Difficulty

There is no more difficult terrain for an intellectual tradition committed simultaneously to critical independence and genuine democratic engagement than the terrain of religion in a Muslim-majority society. The difficulty is structural: religion in such societies is not merely a dimension of private belief, not merely an arrangement of spiritual practices and theological commitments that individuals pursue in the domain of personal conscience while public life is organized on different principles. Religion is woven through the social fabric at every level, from the most intimate dimensions of family life through the intermediate structures of community, education, and welfare, to the highest levels of political identity and constitutional legitimacy. Any intellectual tradition that attempts to analyze such a society honestly and rigorously cannot treat religion as peripheral or as a domain that falls outside the scope of serious social and political analysis.

But the difficulty runs deeper than the practical challenge of including religion in an analytical framework designed primarily for secular social science. It runs into the fundamental question of what the relationship between critical reason and religious commitment should be: whether the tradition of rational criticism that the intellectual lineage of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan embodies is compatible with genuine Islamic commitment, whether it requires a secular orientation that effectively marginalizes religion, or whether there is a way of engaging with religious tradition from within the framework of critical reason that neither reduces religion to a social phenomenon to be explained from the outside nor abandons the commitment to critical inquiry that the tradition's intellectual integrity requires.

This question has no simple answer, and the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has not offered one. What it has offered instead is a sustained and serious engagement with the question itself: an engagement that has generated specific analytical insights, specific political positions, specific controversies, and specific intellectual developments that constitute one of the most important and most revealing dimensions of the tradition's broader intellectual project. It is to the detailed examination of this engagement that Part Six is devoted.

51.2 The Trap of Secular Dismissal

The most tempting response, for a critical intellectual tradition operating in a context where religion has repeatedly been deployed in the service of political reaction, social conservatism, and authoritarian control, is the response of secular dismissal: the position that religion is essentially a form of false consciousness, a system of belief and practice that serves to legitimate existing power relations, to prevent the rational analysis of social conditions, and to channel legitimate popular frustration with economic exploitation and political oppression into movements that serve the interests of the exploiting and oppressing classes. This is a position with a distinguished intellectual pedigree, traceable from Voltaire and the Enlightenment critique of institutional religion through Marx's celebrated characterization of religion as the opium of the people to the various forms of secularist modernization theory that dominated social science in the mid-twentieth century.

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has consistently rejected this position, not out of personal religious sentiment, though all three figures have personal relationships with the Islamic tradition of varying character and intensity, but for analytical reasons that are grounded in their specific understanding of Bengali Muslim history and social reality.

The analytical rejection of secular dismissal proceeds from a recognition that is central to the tradition's entire approach: that the social and political reality of Bangladesh cannot be understood by imposing theoretical frameworks developed in other social and historical contexts onto it, however intellectually respectable those frameworks may be in their original contexts. The secularization thesis, the claim that modernity necessarily involves the retreat of religion from public life and the progressive rationalization of social and political institutions, was developed primarily in the context of Western European social history, and its applicability to the very different historical trajectories of Muslim-majority societies in South Asia and elsewhere has been contested by developments that do not fit its predictions.

The specific history of Bengal provides the clearest evidence against the secular dismissal position. Islam came to Bengal, as the tradition has consistently noted, primarily through the activities of Sufi missionaries and saints rather than through military conquest or state imposition. The specific character of Bengali Islam, its syncretic quality, its incorporation of local pre-Islamic traditions, its emphasis on devotional practice and spiritual experience over legal formalism and doctrinal orthodoxy, and its deep integration with Bengali cultural life, reflects this specific historical formation. A tradition that dismisses this Islam as false consciousness or as a form of social control imposed from above is not engaging with the actual historical and social reality of Bengali Muslim life; it is imposing a theoretical schema on that reality that distorts rather than illuminates it.

51.3 The Trap of Uncritical Affirmation

The opposite trap is equally dangerous: the position of uncritical affirmation, the claim that Islamic tradition, properly understood, provides all the resources necessary for the cultural, political, and intellectual development of Bengali Muslim society, and that the critical engagement with that tradition from the perspective of secular reason is not merely unnecessary but positively harmful, a form of cultural colonialism that imposes Western intellectual frameworks on an Islamic tradition that has its own perfectly adequate resources for addressing the questions that matter.

This position is tempting for reasons that are the mirror image of the reasons that make secular dismissal tempting: just as secular dismissal appeals to the intellectual who finds in religion a perpetual obstacle to the rational organization of social life, uncritical affirmation appeals to the Muslim intellectual who finds in Western secular reason a perpetual extension of colonial power dressed in the language of universal reason and human rights.

The tradition's rejection of uncritical affirmation is equally principled and equally grounded in its specific analytical commitments. The historical record of Islamic civilization, taken honestly, does not support the claim that Islamic tradition has always provided adequate resources for addressing the full range of questions that the contemporary situation requires. Islamic societies, like all human societies, have been capable of both extraordinary achievements and profound failures. The tradition of Islamic scholarship includes both genuine intellectual glories and genuine intellectual limitations. Honest engagement with Islamic intellectual tradition requires acknowledging both, not as a gesture of cultural condescension but as a condition of genuine intellectual respect: the respect that takes a tradition seriously enough to engage with it critically.

The specific political context of Bangladesh in the 2020s makes uncritical affirmation particularly dangerous. The potential rise of political Islam in Bangladesh may lead to the erosion of neutral religious values and the rise of conservative sentiments. Incidents such as the cancellation of women's football matches, threats against a mystic sect's music festival, and attacks on shrines and Sufi centres underscore the possible erosion of liberalism. [East Asia Forum](#) These are real and serious developments that the tradition cannot honestly address from a position of uncritical affirmation of Islamic political movements. The tradition's commitment to the values of equality, human dignity, and social justice that it has consistently identified as the founding principles of the liberation war requires an honest assessment of whether specific Islamic political formations in Bangladesh are advancing or obstructing those values, regardless of whether that assessment is welcome to those formations.

51.4 The Third Path: Critical Solidarity

The tradition's approach to the question of religion is best characterized as critical solidarity: an orientation that takes Islamic tradition seriously, that recognizes its genuine importance for the lives and the self-understanding of the overwhelming majority of Bangladeshis, that refuses the condescension of secular dismissal, and that simultaneously insists on the right and the responsibility of critical reason to engage with that tradition honestly, to identify its genuine resources for the democratic and cultural development of Bangladesh, and to challenge its

manifestations that obstruct rather than advance the values of justice, equality, and human dignity.

This orientation is not a compromise between competing positions. It is a principled third position that is grounded in the tradition's specific understanding of the relationship between critical reason and religious commitment in the specific historical and social conditions of Bengal. It draws on the resources of Islamic intellectual tradition itself, particularly its traditions of rational theological inquiry (kalam), legal reasoning (ijtihād), and mystical thought (tasawwuf), to argue that genuine engagement with Islamic tradition from the perspective of critical reason is not a betrayal of Islamic commitment but one of its highest expressions.

The theoretical resources for this argument are available in the work of a number of Islamic thinkers whom the tradition has engaged with, including Frantz Fanon's analysis of how colonized peoples' cultural and religious identities can be resources for liberation rather than obstacles to it, Talal Asad's anthropological analysis of the diversity of Islamic traditions and their relationship to modernity, and the broader tradition of critical Islamic thought that includes figures like Abdallah Laroui, Mohammed Arkoun, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. Khan in particular has drawn on these thinkers in developing the tradition's engagement with the question of Islam and critical reason.

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO: THE SUFI HERITAGE OF BENGAL AND ITS POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Lalon Shah, the Baul Tradition, and the Alternative Islamic Imagination

52.1 Islam Arrives in Bengal: The Sufi Path

The history of how Islam came to Bengal is not merely a historical curiosity. It is a foundational fact for understanding the specific character of Bengali Islam and its relationship to the political and cultural questions that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has engaged with. Unlike in other parts of the Muslim world where Islamization was accomplished primarily through military conquest and state imposition, the conversion of the majority of Bengal's population to Islam was a gradual process extending over several centuries, in which Sufi missionaries and saints played the central role, and in which the specific content of Islamic teaching that took root in Bengal was shaped by its interaction with indigenous Bengali religious and cultural traditions in ways that produced a form of Islam that is in important respects different from the legalistic, doctrinally orthodox forms of Islam associated with the Arab heartland and its various reformist movements.

For many years, Bangladesh was a Sufi-influenced, tolerant society in which Hindus and Muslims lived side by side, celebrating each other's festivals and respecting local traditions. [The Diplomat](#) This characterization, while subject to the qualification that it somewhat idealizes a more complex historical reality, captures something genuinely important about the specific form that Islam has taken in Bangladesh. The emphasis on devotional practice, on the relationship

between the disciple and the spiritual guide (murshid), on the cultivation of inner spiritual states, and on the importance of love and compassion as the foundations of religious life, that characterize the Sufi tradition, were powerfully compatible with the religious sensibilities already present in Bengal's syncretic religious landscape.

The political significance of this historical formation cannot be overstated. It means that the Islam that the majority of Bangladeshis have practiced for centuries is not the Islam of rigid legal formalism and doctrinal exclusivity that reformist and fundamentalist movements have attempted to impose on Bengali Muslim society from outside, but a form of Islam that is deeply integrated with Bengali cultural life, that incorporates elements of indigenous Bengali religious tradition, and that has historically been characterized by a tolerance of religious difference and a spirit of religious synthesis that is fundamentally incompatible with the exclusivist political Islam of movements like Jamaat-e-Islami.

52.2 Lalon Shah: The Mystic as Social Philosopher

No figure in the Bengali intellectual and cultural tradition is more important for understanding the alternative Islamic imagination that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan draws on than Lalon Shah, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century mystic poet and composer whose songs, known as Lalon Geeti, continue to be among the most widely sung and most deeply cherished cultural productions in the Bengali-speaking world.

Lalon Shah, who lived from approximately 1774 to 1890 and who spent most of his life in the Kushtia district of what is now Bangladesh, was a figure whose religious identity defied the categorical boundaries that both Hindu and Muslim communal identities attempted to impose. He explicitly refused identification with either the Hindu or the Muslim community, preferring to understand himself as a human being whose primary identity was spiritual rather than communal. His songs express a form of religious experience that is rooted in the traditions of Bengali Sufi mysticism but that transcends the specific institutional forms of any particular religion in favor of a universal spiritual vision that finds the divine in the human, in love, in self-knowledge, and in the cultivation of inner spiritual freedom.

The political significance of Lalon's work for the tradition's engagement with religion goes beyond his biographical eccentricity. It lies in the specific character of the alternative religious vision that his songs articulate: a vision that is anti-communal without being anti-religious, that is spiritually intense without being doctrinally exclusive, and that is culturally Bengali without being either exclusively Hindu or exclusively Muslim in its specific commitments. This alternative vision provides a resource for Bengali Muslim intellectual culture that is simultaneously authentically rooted in the specific religious and cultural traditions of Bengal and genuinely resistant to the communal politics that has consistently sought to replace the syncretic tradition with a doctrinally pure but culturally alien religious identity.

Salimullah Khan has written extensively on Lalon Shah, developing an interpretation that positions Lalon as a specifically anti-colonial and anti-establishment thinker whose religious vision contained within it a critique of social hierarchy and communal division that was simultaneously spiritual and political. This interpretation is consistent with the tradition's broader

approach to Bengali cultural history: the insistence on finding within the Bengali tradition itself, rather than importing from outside, the resources for the democratic and egalitarian political culture that the tradition has consistently advocated.

52.3 The Baul Tradition and Its Contemporary Significance

The Baul tradition, of which Lalon Shah is the most celebrated representative but which encompasses a far broader range of mystic poets, musicians, and spiritual practitioners, represents a dimension of Bengali religious culture that the tradition has consistently identified as one of the most valuable resources for genuine cultural development. The Bauls are itinerant mystic musicians who practice a form of spirituality that combines elements of Sufi Islam, Vaishnavite Hinduism, and Tantric Buddhism in a syncretic mixture that reflects the specific cultural environment of the Bengal delta across the centuries.

The Baul tradition's significance for the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is multiple. It represents an alternative to both the doctrinally orthodox forms of Islam associated with Islamist political movements and the secularist dismissal of religion that some dimensions of Bengali progressive culture have advocated. It demonstrates, in its specific artistic and spiritual practice, that the Bengali religious imagination is not exhausted by the binary of Islamic orthodoxy versus secular modernity but contains within it resources for a form of human life that is simultaneously spiritually rich, culturally distinctive, and compatible with the values of equality, love, and human dignity that the tradition has consistently advocated.

The contemporary political significance of the Baul tradition has become more acute in the post-2024 political environment. The rise of Islamist political influence following the fall of the Hasina government has generated specific threats to Sufi and Baul religious practice. Theological differences such as conflicting views on the Sufi-influenced practices popular among many Bangladeshi Muslims have historically divided Islamic parties and could hinder their ability to form a cohesive coalition. [East Asia Forum](#) But the hostility to Sufi practices is not merely a source of intra-Islamist division; it is a direct threat to a dimension of Bengali cultural life that the tradition has consistently identified as one of its most valuable resources. Attacks on Sufi shrines, threats against mystic music festivals, and the more general pressure against forms of religious practice that deviate from Salafi or Deobandi orthodoxy, represent a form of cultural destruction that the tradition's analytical framework identifies as both religiously and politically reactionary.

52.4 The Sufi Heritage and the July 2024 Revolution

One of the most analytically interesting dimensions of the 2024 political upheaval is the role that Sufi-influenced religious formations played in the mass uprising that brought down the Hasina government. Research indicates that Sufi teachings emphasized justice and resistance against oppression, inspiring groups like Hefazat-e-Islam to participate actively in the uprising and galvanizing public support against the ruling government. [RSIS International](#)

This is a complex and somewhat paradoxical dimension of the 2024 events that the tradition's analytical framework must grapple with honestly. Hefazat-e-Islam, the mass Islamist

organization that participated in the uprising, is not a Sufi organization in the straightforward sense; it is primarily associated with the Qawmi madrasa system and with forms of Islam that have sometimes been hostile to specifically Sufi practices. Yet its grassroots organizational capacity, which reflects its deep embeddedness in the social fabric of rural Bangladesh through the madrasa network, drew on modes of communal organization and religious motivation that have historical roots in the Sufi traditions of Bengal even where they have formally departed from Sufi doctrinal commitments.

The tradition's analytical framework provides tools for thinking about this complexity. The Sufi heritage of Bengal is not simply an organizational form that can be neutrally deployed in the service of any political purpose; it is a substantive cultural and spiritual tradition with its own normative commitments, including the commitments to social justice, to the equality of all human beings before the divine, and to resistance against oppression, that Sufi intellectual traditions have articulated. The question of whether specific organizations that mobilized in the 2024 uprising were genuinely drawing on these normative commitments or merely on the organizational structures of the Sufi tradition for purposes that are not continuous with its genuine values is a question that the tradition's framework insists on asking, even when the political dynamics of the moment create pressure to simply celebrate the uprising's success without examining the specific character of the forces that contributed to it.

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE: SECULARISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The Constitutional History of a Contested Principle and the Tradition's Response

53.1 The 1972 Constitution and the Promise of Secularism

The Constitution of Bangladesh, adopted in November 1972, placed secularism among the four fundamental principles of the new state, alongside democracy, nationalism, and socialism. This constitutional choice reflected a specific political and intellectual context: the experience of liberation from a Pakistani state whose national ideology had been organized around Islamic identity and whose use of that identity to suppress Bengali linguistic and cultural rights had been experienced by the liberation movement's leadership as a decisive demonstration that religious nationalism was incompatible with the genuine freedom of a Bengali-speaking people.

The constitutional secularism of 1972 was not, in its specific formulation, the secularism of the French *laïcité* tradition, which insists on the strict separation of religion and public life and treats religion as essentially a private matter with no legitimate role in public discourse. It was a form of secularism that, as subsequent interpreters including Sofa and Khan have noted, was compatible with genuine religious practice and with the public expression of religious identity, while insisting that the state should not discriminate between citizens on the basis of religion and that religion should not be used as the basis for political mobilization of a divisive or exclusionary kind.

The specific formulation of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's secularism, as he repeatedly explained to audiences who questioned whether it implied hostility to Islam, was that it was not opposition to religion but opposition to the instrumentalization of religion for divisive political purposes. The distinction between genuine religious practice and the political manipulation of religious sentiment is one that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has consistently maintained, and it provides a framework for understanding both the genuine achievement of the 1972 constitution's secularism and the specific ways in which that secularism was subsequently undermined.

53.2 The Erosion of Constitutional Secularism: A Historical Analysis

In 1977, after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, secularism was removed from the constitution by a Martial Law directive during the military dictatorship of Ziaur Rahman. In 1988, the Parliament of Bangladesh declared Islam as the state religion during the presidency of Hussain Muhammad Ershad. [Wikipedia](#)

These constitutional changes are among the most important events in the political and cultural history of Bangladesh, and the tradition's analytical framework provides specific tools for understanding their significance that purely legalistic or procedural analyses cannot provide.

The removal of secularism from the constitution by Ziaur Rahman in 1977 was not merely a constitutional amendment. It was a deliberate and consequential political strategy whose effects extended far beyond the formal change in the constitutional text. By replacing the principle of secularism with the phrase absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, the Zia constitutional amendment signaled a fundamental reorientation of the relationship between the state and religious identity: a shift from a state that was neutral between different religious communities toward a state that formally identified itself with the majority religious community and that could therefore use Islamic identity as a resource for political mobilization in ways that the 1972 constitutional framework explicitly prohibited.

The tradition's analysis of this shift connects it to the broader dynamics of military-political legitimization. Ziaur Rahman came to power through a military coup and needed to establish political legitimacy for a government that had no democratic mandate. The invocation of Islamic identity served this purpose by providing a basis for political appeal that was not dependent on electoral success or programmatic political persuasion. Post 1975, frequent military interventions strengthened, furthered and consolidated the political stronghold of the religious forces. Gen. Zia-ur Rahman who took over in 1977 needed political legitimacy and Islam turned out to be his support base. Despite being not overtly religious, he rekindled latent Islamic undercurrents, and his political outfit, the BNP, gradually relegated the Bengali cultural identity to promote Islam as the primary national identity. [Vifindia](#)

The Ershad constitutional amendment of 1988, which declared Islam the state religion, further institutionalized the Islamic orientation of the Bangladeshi state in ways that have proved extraordinarily difficult to reverse. After the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1990, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Awami League governments retained Islam as the state religion. [Wikipedia](#) The retention of Islamic state religion status by both major parties, including the Awami League whose ideological tradition was rooted in the secular Bengali nationalism of

the liberation period, represents precisely the kind of political accommodation to religious political pressure that Sofa identified as characteristic of the Bangladeshi intellectual and political class. The formal constitutional commitment to secularism was restored by a 2010 Supreme Court ruling that declared the 1977 Zia amendment unconstitutional, but the specific provision making Islam the state religion was retained, creating the paradoxical constitutional condition in which both secularism and Islamic state religion coexist in the same constitutional framework.

53.3 The Tradition's Critique of Constitutional Secularism's Specific Formulation

The tradition's engagement with the secularism question is not simply a defense of the 1972 constitutional position against subsequent erosion. It is a more complex and more analytically rigorous engagement that includes a critique of the specific formulation of secularism in the 1972 constitution itself, and a broader questioning of whether the Western concept of secularism is the appropriate conceptual framework for understanding and regulating the relationship between religion and political life in Bangladesh.

Some scholars argue that secularization efforts under the Mujib regime made the people suspicious of his commitment to religion, citing the elimination of Qur'anic inscriptions from the Dhaka University monogram, the deletion of the word Muslim from the name of a university hall, and other measures as evidence that secularism as implemented was experienced as anti-Islamic. [MDPI](#)

The tradition's response to this historical evidence is characteristically nuanced. It acknowledges that the specific implementation of secularism in the early post-independence period did in some cases create gratuitous offense to religious sensibility without serving any compelling political or cultural purpose. The removal of Qur'anic inscriptions from university buildings, for instance, was experienced by many Bengali Muslims as an attack on their religious identity that was not required by any principled conception of secularism and that served primarily to alienate precisely the population that the new state most needed to bring into confident democratic participation. Sofa's analysis of this period, which he conducted with his characteristic directness, acknowledged that the post-independence leadership's handling of the religious question reflected a kind of cultural insensitivity born of elite detachment from mass religious culture that was itself a manifestation of the colonial inheritance the tradition has consistently criticized.

Yet acknowledging these specific failures of implementation does not lead the tradition to abandon the substantive commitment that constitutional secularism expresses: the commitment to a state that does not discriminate between citizens on the basis of religion, that does not use public resources and public authority to privilege one religious community over others, and that insists on the political equality of all citizens regardless of their religious identity or absence thereof. This commitment is not derived from Western secularist philosophy and imposed on Bangladesh from outside; it is derived from the specific content of the liberation war's founding principles, from the experience of living in a Pakistani state that used Islamic identity to suppress Bengali cultural rights, and from the straightforward democratic argument that a state that

formally identifies with the religion of the majority community cannot provide genuine equality to the minority.

53.4 The Post-2024 Constitutional Question: A New Reckoning

The political upheaval of 2024 and the constitutional reform process it initiated have reopened the question of secularism and its relationship to Islam in Bangladeshi public life in ways that are both more urgent and more complex than at any previous point in the country's post-independence history.

Despite being founded on secular principles in 1971, the notion of Bangladesh as a strictly secular state is challenged. Secularism was enshrined as a foundational state principle, but its imposition occurred top-down, diverging from prevailing societal ethos. The immediacy of public backlash following its inclusion compelled ruling elites to adopt religion-sensitive policies. [Wiley Online Library](#)

The post-2024 political landscape has intensified these dynamics in specific ways. The rise of Islamist political parties as significant players in the post-Hasina political environment has created conditions in which the question of the place of Islam in the constitutional framework is being negotiated not in the abstract terms of constitutional theory but in the concrete terms of specific political bargains and specific institutional choices. The rise of Islamic parties will have profound impacts for the future of Bangladesh's democracy, governance, and societal values. [East Asia Forum](#)

The tradition's analytical framework insists on maintaining the analytical distinction between these different dimensions of the religious question: between the specific institutional choices about the constitutional relationship between the state and religion, the broader question of the role of religious values and religious communities in democratic political life, and the still broader question of what genuine Islamic intellectual tradition has to offer to the political and cultural development of Bangladesh. These distinctions are frequently collapsed in political discourse, where the defense of democratic secularism is portrayed as hostility to Islam and the promotion of Islamic political influence is portrayed as genuine religious commitment. The tradition's framework refuses this collapse and insists on the analytical precision that genuine understanding requires.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR: THE MADRASA QUESTION

Islamic Education, the Qawmi System, and the Politics of Intellectual Formation

54.1 Two Systems, One Society

Bangladesh's educational system is, uniquely among major Muslim-majority countries, organized around two genuinely parallel and in important respects genuinely divergent institutional systems: the government general educational system, which follows the curriculum

developed through the colonial and post-colonial state, conducts its instruction primarily in Bengali (with the additional English-medium system discussed in Part Five), and is oriented toward the knowledge and credentials required for participation in the modern professional and administrative world; and the madrasa educational system, which follows a curriculum derived from traditional Islamic learning, conducts its instruction in Arabic, Bengali, and Urdu, and is oriented toward the religious knowledge and the spiritual formation required for roles in Islamic religious leadership and community life.

The madrasa system is not a single unified institution. It is itself divided into two major streams: the Aliyah madrasa system, which is government-registered and government-funded, follows a curriculum that combines traditional Islamic learning with elements of the general educational curriculum, and is regarded by many as a hybrid that satisfies neither traditional Islamic educational norms nor modern secular educational requirements; and the Qawmi madrasa system, which is entirely independent of government funding and government curriculum oversight, follows the Dars-i Nizami curriculum developed in eighteenth century India, and is the primary institutional basis of the major Islamist movements, including Hefazat-e-Islam.

The political and cultural significance of this educational duality is enormous, and it has received sustained attention from the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan. The two educational systems produce two distinct intellectual cultures: cultures that differ not merely in their specific knowledge content but in their fundamental orientations, their characteristic modes of reasoning, their relationship to authority, their conception of the nature and purpose of knowledge, and their understanding of the relationship between the individual and the community.

54.2 Khan's Position on Qawmi Madrasa Recognition

In April 2017, as the government of Bangladesh took the decision to recognize the Dawra degree of the Qawmi madrasa system, Khan hailed the decision as important for integration of the Qawmi group into the national mainstream. He discussed how Islam was propagated in Bengal through the medium of Bengali language. [Wikipedia](#)

Khan's support for the recognition of the Qawmi Dawra degree is one of the most controversial positions he has taken, and it reveals the complexity of the tradition's approach to the madrasa question with particular clarity. The controversy is understandable: in the specific political context of 2017 Bangladesh, the Hasina government's recognition of the Qawmi degree was widely interpreted as a political concession to Hefazat-e-Islam, whose organizational muscle the government was seeking to neutralize by incorporating its leadership into the political mainstream. Khan's support for the decision was therefore interpreted by many of his intellectual contemporaries as a form of political accommodation to Islamist pressure that was inconsistent with his earlier support for the secular values of the liberation struggle.

Khan's own justification for his position is more sophisticated than his critics acknowledged. His argument was not that the Qawmi madrasa curriculum is intellectually adequate or that the specific Islamic educational tradition of the Qawmi system is the best available resource for the development of Bangladeshi intellectual life. His argument was that the failure to recognize the Qawmi Dawra degree was a form of institutional discrimination that created a specific injustice:

it denied recognition to the educational achievements of millions of students who had pursued their education in the Qawmi system, effectively treating them as educationally invisible in the formal credentialing system of the state. This is a straightforward equity argument that is consistent with the tradition's broader commitment to the equal treatment of all citizens regardless of the educational path they have chosen.

The deeper argument that Khan was making connects to the tradition's analysis of the colonial inheritance in Bengali educational culture. The refusal to recognize Qawmi education reflects a specific hierarchical understanding of educational legitimacy in which only educational forms that conform to the model established by the colonial-era general educational system are treated as genuinely valid. This hierarchical understanding is itself a colonial inheritance that privileges specific forms of knowledge and specific institutional frameworks over others in ways that reproduce colonial cultural hierarchy rather than dismantling it. Recognizing the Qawmi degree is therefore not merely an act of political accommodation but a step toward the genuine de-hierarchicalization of Bangladeshi educational culture that the tradition's framework consistently advocates.

54.3 The Intellectual Culture of the Madrasa: A Critical Assessment

The tradition's engagement with the madrasa question is not limited to the institutional and political dimensions of the recognition controversy. It extends to a substantive assessment of the intellectual culture that the madrasa system produces and the question of what relationship that culture has to the tradition's own intellectual commitments.

Sofa engaged with this question directly in several of his essays, and his assessment was characteristically complex. He recognized in the madrasa tradition genuine intellectual resources, particularly in the domains of Arabic and Persian literature, Islamic philosophy, and the tradition of theological reasoning that the Islamic scholarly tradition had developed over centuries. But he also identified specific intellectual limitations: the tendency toward rote memorization and textual reproduction over critical engagement and original inquiry, the closure of the curriculum to the intellectual developments of the past several centuries in science, philosophy, and social theory, and the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student that tends to discourage the questioning and the independent thought that genuine intellectual development requires.

These criticisms are not unique to Sofa; they are recognizable to anyone who has studied the sociology of traditional education in any cultural context, whether Islamic, Hindu, or Christian. The specific challenge for the tradition is to engage with them honestly without reproducing the colonial dismissal of traditional knowledge forms that treats everything outside the Western academic tradition as intellectually inferior. The madrasa tradition contains genuine intellectual resources that the Western academic tradition has not fully recognized or engaged with. Acknowledging the genuine limitations of the madrasa curriculum while honoring these genuine resources is the kind of balanced analytical engagement that the tradition's framework demands and that is far more difficult than either simple celebration or simple dismissal.

54.4 The Political Mobilization of the Madrasa Network in 2024

The mass uprising of 2024 demonstrated the extraordinary political mobilization capacity of the Qawmi madrasa network in ways that have forced a reassessment of the political significance of Islamic education in Bangladesh across the analytical spectrum. The study finds that public frustration with authoritarian governance intensified public dissent, and the Sufi-based Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh's grassroots mobilization efforts played an influential role in the outcome of the July Revolution against the Awami League. [RSIS International](#)

The mobilization capacity of the madrasa network is the direct result of its specific institutional character. The Qawmi madrasa system, which is entirely independent of government funding and therefore entirely independent of government control, has developed over decades an institutional network of extraordinary density and resilience that connects religious scholars, students, and communities across the entire territory of Bangladesh in ways that the state cannot easily monitor, regulate, or suppress. This organizational capacity, combined with the intense personal loyalty that characterizes the relationship between madrasa students and their teachers, creates conditions for rapid and effective political mobilization that no secular political organization in Bangladesh can match.

The tradition's analytical response to this demonstrated organizational capacity is not simply to celebrate it as a form of people's power or simply to fear it as a threat to democratic values. It is to analyze it in its specific social and political context: to understand what values and what political commitments the madrasa network's organizational capacity was mobilized in service of in 2024, to assess whether those commitments are consistent with or in tension with the founding values of the liberation struggle, and to consider what political implications the madrasa network's demonstrated organizational power has for the future of democratic governance in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE: COMMUNALISM AND ITS HISTORICAL ROOTS

Khan's Analysis of the Origins of Religious Division and the Colonial Legacy

55.1 The Colonial Production of Communalism

One of Khan's most important and most consistently developed analytical positions is his account of the historical origins of communalism in South Asia, which he traces directly to the specific policies and political strategies of British colonial administration. This account, which draws on a substantial body of historical scholarship as well as on Khan's own theoretical framework, is not a simple version of the divide-and-rule thesis that assigns all South Asian communal conflict to British manipulation. It is a more sophisticated analysis of how colonial institutions, colonial census categories, colonial legal structures, and colonial political reforms created the conditions in which religious identity became the primary basis for political organization and political conflict.

Khan analyzes the issue of communalism and extremism from a historical perspective and locates the origin of communalism in South Asia in the British colonial period. [Wikipedia](#) The

specific mechanisms of the colonial production of communalism that Khan's analysis identifies include the introduction of separate electoral rolls for Hindu and Muslim voters in the Indian Councils Act of 1909, the systematic categorization of the Indian population by religious community in the decennial census, the deliberate encouragement of competing communal organizations as a strategy for preventing unified anti-colonial political mobilization, and the specific educational policies that created different channels of educational opportunity for Hindu and Muslim communities in ways that structured communal competition for access to colonial administrative positions.

Khan's argument is not that communal conflict would not have existed in the absence of British colonialism; the social history of pre-colonial Bengal includes instances of communal tension and conflict that cannot be attributed to colonial policy. His argument is that the specific form and the specific intensity of communal conflict in South Asia, the form that ultimately produced the catastrophic communal violence of the 1947 Partition and that continues to shape the political culture of the region, were products of the specific institutional and political structures of British colonial rule, and that understanding this colonial production of communalism is a precondition for developing political strategies adequate to addressing it.

55.2 Communalism in Post-Independence Bangladesh

The colonial origins of South Asian communalism do not exhaust the analysis of communalism in Bangladesh, because communalism in independent Bangladesh is not simply a legacy of colonialism that persists unchanged from the colonial period but a dynamic phenomenon that has been shaped by the specific post-independence conditions of Bangladeshi political and social life.

The liberation war itself had a specific communal dimension that the tradition has engaged with honestly, if not always comfortably. The Pakistani military's violence in 1971 was not random; it was directed with particular ferocity at specific communities, including the Hindu minority community of East Pakistan, which was identified by the Pakistani military and its collaborators as the primary constituency of Bengali nationalism. The experience of this violence, combined with the mass migration of Hindu Bangladeshis to India during the war, significantly altered the demographic character of Bangladesh in ways that have had lasting consequences for communal relations.

The post-liberation history of the Hindu minority community in Bangladesh is one of progressive demographic decline, economic marginalization, and episodic communal violence that the tradition has addressed, though again not always with the sustained and systematic attention that the issue's gravity warrants. The communal violence that has followed major political events, including the violence against Hindu communities following the 2001 elections and the more recent violence following the fall of the Hasina government in 2024, represents a persistent failure of the Bangladeshi state and civil society to provide equal protection to all citizens regardless of religious identity.

Khan denounced communal attacks and suggests that upholding social justice is critical to drive away communalism from the national arena. He defends the equal right of all communities to

observe their respective religions, and believes that proper education and guidance is critical to dissuade the young generation from going down the path of extremism. [Wikipedia](#)

This position is consistent with the tradition's broader commitment to equality and human dignity, and with the specific argument that genuine decolonization requires dismantling the communal divisions that colonialism installed rather than reproducing them in new political clothing. But the tradition's critics have argued that the position is insufficiently developed in its analysis of the specific mechanisms through which communal violence is produced and reproduced in contemporary Bangladesh, and that genuine progress on the communal question requires more than general affirmations of equality and more specific and more politically difficult engagement with the institutional structures and the political incentives that make communal violence a persistent feature of Bangladeshi political life.

55.3 The Jamaat-e-Islami Question: Khan's Structural Critique

The Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest organized Islamist political party in Bangladesh and the political organization most directly associated with collaboration with the Pakistani military in 1971, has been a persistent subject of the tradition's political analysis. Khan's engagement with Jamaat-e-Islami is particularly important because it illustrates the tradition's approach to the question of political Islam with unusual clarity.

Khan has said that Islam has a revolutionary legacy, but it also had a reactionary persona. Jamaat was born out of a rightwing reactionary legacy. Khan has argued that Jamaat took the opportunity to contest from vacant Awami League seats in the same way that it had the chance to fight for Bangladesh's liberation, asserting that they have always made the wrong choices and that Jamaat is changing but will continue to be on the wrong side because it is in a wrong structure. [BD News 24](#)

Khan's structural critique of Jamaat-e-Islami is philosophically important because it refuses both the simple condemnation that treats Jamaat as simply evil and the more sympathetic analysis that treats it as a legitimate political party that has simply made strategic errors. His argument is that Jamaat's consistent tendency toward the wrong political choices, its collaboration with Pakistani authoritarianism in 1971, its subsequent alliances with military regimes in Bangladesh, its opposition to the democratic values that the liberation struggle expressed, is not accidental but structural: it is the result of the specific intellectual and organizational foundations on which the party was built, foundations that make it constitutively incapable of genuinely affirming the democratic and egalitarian values that the liberation struggle expressed.

The intellectual foundation of Jamaat-e-Islami is the thought of Syed Abul Ala Maududi, the Pakistani-Indian Islamic theorist whose specific interpretation of Islam as a complete political system requiring the establishment of an Islamic state governed by divine law represents a specific theological and political position that is in fundamental tension with the democratic and egalitarian values the tradition has consistently advocated. The tradition's critique of Jamaat is not primarily a critique of Islam; it is a critique of a specific interpretation of Islam, the Maududi interpretation, that subordinates democracy to theocracy and treats political power as a means of

imposing religious conformity rather than as a mechanism for achieving the genuine consent of the governed.

55.4 The Post-2024 Rise of Political Islam: Analytical Challenges

Since the fall of the Awami League government in Bangladesh on August 5, 2024, following a student-led mass uprising, religious violence has surged in the country. Attacks on religious minority communities, especially Hindus, have grown. Besides, differences within the Muslim majority over doctrinal interpretations, control of religious sites, and political influence have come to the fore, erupting in violent clashes. [The Diplomat](#)

The specific dynamics of post-2024 Bangladesh present the tradition's analytical framework with some of its most serious contemporary challenges. The rise of Islamist political influence in the post-Hasina political landscape is not a simple phenomenon that can be analyzed with the conceptual tools that the tradition developed in earlier political contexts. It involves a complex interaction between genuine popular religious sentiment, strategic political opportunism, organizational capacity built through decades of investment in madrasa education and welfare services, and the specific political vacuum created by the delegitimation of the Awami League and the organizational weakness of secular and left-wing political formations.

As Bangladesh prepares for a general election expected in late 2025 or early 2026, traditional parties must address their internal challenges and prioritize understanding public sentiment while strategically planning their next political moves. The rise of Islamic parties will have profound impacts for the future of Bangladesh's democracy, governance and societal values. [East Asia Forum](#)

The tradition's analytical response to these dynamics is not to simply oppose Islamist political participation or to argue that Islamic political parties should be excluded from democratic competition. Its framework is committed to democratic values, and democratic values require the acceptance of all political actors who are themselves committed to democratic rules and democratic outcomes. The tradition's specific critique of specific Islamist formations is not that they are Islamic but that their specific political commitments, their treatment of religious minorities, their attitudes toward women's rights, their relationship to democratic institutions, are inconsistent with the founding values of the liberation struggle and with the constitutional commitments that all political parties in Bangladesh have formally accepted.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX: RAZZAQ AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF MUSLIM POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The Formation of Bengali Muslim Political Identity in Historical Perspective

56.1 Razzaq's Historical Sociology of Muslim Bengal

Abdur Razzaq's contribution to the tradition's engagement with Islam and Islamic identity is less directly expressed in specific written statements about religion than in the broader historical-sociological framework he developed for understanding the formation of Muslim political consciousness in Bengal, a framework that shaped the thinking of both Sofa and Khan and that provides essential analytical context for understanding the tradition's more explicit engagements with the religious question.

Razzaq's historical sociology, reconstructed from the accounts of those who attended his seminars and from the few written documents that capture aspects of his thinking, was organized around the question of how specifically Muslim Bengali political consciousness developed: how the Bengali Muslims of the colonial period, who were by the late nineteenth century a clear demographic majority in eastern Bengal but a social and economic minority in terms of access to education, administrative positions, and cultural prestige, came to develop a form of political consciousness organized around religious identity rather than around the class identity that might have provided a different organizational basis for political action.

This question had obvious personal resonance for Razzaq, who was himself the son of a Bengali Muslim police officer and who had navigated the specific social conditions of Bengali Muslim professional life under colonialism. But its analytical significance extended far beyond personal resonance. It was, in Razzaq's analysis, one of the foundational questions for understanding the political trajectories of both Pakistan and Bangladesh: why a Muslim political consciousness organized around religious identity rather than linguistic or class identity became the dominant form of political mobilization for the Bengali Muslim majority, and what consequences this specific form of political consciousness had for the political development of the region.

56.2 The Laski Connection and the Analysis of Muslim Political Formation

Razzaq's engagement with this question was shaped by his exposure to Harold Laski's political sociology, which provided him with analytical tools for understanding how political consciousness is formed in relation to specific social and institutional conditions. Laski's pluralist account of the state and his analysis of how different social groups develop different forms of political consciousness in relation to their specific social positions and their specific experiences of inclusion or exclusion from political life provided Razzaq with a framework that he could apply to the specific conditions of Bengali Muslim political formation.

The application of this Laskian framework to Bengali Muslim political history generated insights that were genuinely original in the Indian and Bengali political science of the 1940s and 1950s. Razzaq's analysis identified several specific factors in the colonial experience that contributed to the formation of a religious rather than class or linguistic form of Muslim political consciousness. The most important of these was the specific structure of access to colonial educational and administrative institutions, which created conditions in which religious identity functioned as a credential for political representation: under the system of separate electorates established by the British, being a Muslim was a prerequisite for representing Muslim constituencies, and therefore the development of explicitly Muslim political organizations was a rational response to the specific institutional incentives that colonial political structures created.

But Razzaq's analysis went beyond this institutional argument to engage with the cultural and psychological dimensions of the formation of Muslim political consciousness. The specific combination of demographic majority status, educational and economic disadvantage relative to the Hindu Bengali elite, and the systematic denial of cultural recognition that characterized the experience of Bengali Muslims under colonialism, created conditions in which religious identity served a specific psychological function: it provided a basis for dignity and collective self-respect that the broader social structure denied. The Muslim political movements of the colonial period were not simply organizational responses to institutional incentives; they were expressions of a genuine desire for recognition, for the acknowledgment of the equal dignity and worth of Bengali Muslim culture and Bengali Muslim people, that the colonial social order systematically withheld.

This analysis has direct implications for understanding the dynamics of Islamic political mobilization in Bangladesh today. When Khan argues that the rise of Islamist political formations in contemporary Bangladesh reflects genuine popular sentiment rather than simply elite manipulation, he is drawing on a framework of analysis that Razzaq developed: an analysis that takes seriously the genuine social and psychological functions that religious identity serves in a society where the experience of cultural marginalization and economic inequality creates specific needs for collective dignity and collective recognition that secular political movements have been inadequate to meet.

56.3 The Pakistan Project and Its Failure: Razzaq's Analysis

Razzaq's analysis of the formation of Bengali Muslim political consciousness provides the essential framework for understanding his interpretation of the Pakistan project and its specific failure in the context of Bangladesh. The Bengal partition of 1947 and the creation of Pakistan represented, in Razzaq's analysis, the logical conclusion of the process of Muslim political consciousness formation that he had traced through the colonial period. But it also represented the beginning of a new and ultimately even more complex process of political development, as the Bengali Muslims who had supported Pakistan in the name of Muslim solidarity discovered that Pakistani national identity was not the same as Bengali Muslim identity and could not accommodate the genuine cultural and linguistic specificity of the Bengali Muslim experience.

The Language Movement of 1952, in which Bengali students and intellectuals died defending the right to use their mother tongue against the imposition of Urdu as the sole official language of Pakistan, was for Razzaq the decisive demonstration that the form of Muslim political consciousness that had supported Pakistan was inadequate: that it had failed to reckon honestly with the depth and the importance of Bengali linguistic and cultural identity, and that the genuine aspirations of Bengali Muslims could not be satisfied by a Pakistani national identity organized exclusively around Islamic religious solidarity.

Razzaq was not alone in this analysis, but his specific contribution was to understand the failure of the Pakistan project in specifically sociological terms rather than simply in terms of Pakistani political incompetence or West Pakistani bad faith. His argument was that the Pakistan project failed in Bengal because it rested on a form of Muslim political consciousness that was adequate for the purposes of anti-colonial mobilization but inadequate for the purposes of constructing a

genuinely democratic and genuinely plural political community: a form of consciousness that could unite diverse Muslim communities in opposition to a common colonial adversary but that could not negotiate the genuine differences of language, culture, economic interest, and political aspiration that those communities brought to the project of constructing a new state.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN: AHMED SOFA AND THE INTERIOR LIFE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Faith, Practice, and the Spiritual Dimensions of Bengali Muslim Existence

57.1 Sofa's Personal Relationship with Islam

Understanding the tradition's engagement with religious questions requires attending to the personal religious lives of its major figures, not because biographical information simply determines intellectual positions, but because the personal experience of religious life provides specific kinds of insight into the character and significance of religious practice that are not available to the purely external observer.

Ahmed Sofa's personal relationship with Islam was complex, intense, and in some respects deeply unconventional. He was not a practicing Muslim in the conventional sense: he did not observe the formal requirements of Islamic practice with the consistency that orthodox religious commitment demands, and his personal lifestyle was in many respects dramatically inconsistent with the norms of Bengali Muslim respectability. Yet his engagement with the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of Islamic tradition was genuine and sustained, and it informed his literary and essayistic work in ways that are not fully appreciated by accounts that reduce him to a secular intellectual who happened to be born into a Muslim family.

Sofa's spiritual engagement with Islam was of a specific kind that reflects the broader tradition of Sufi mysticism and the Baul tradition that he revered. It was a form of religious engagement organized around the direct spiritual experience of the divine rather than around legal observance and doctrinal conformity: a form that valued inner spiritual transformation over external ritual performance, and that located the essential content of religious life in the cultivation of love, compassion, and self-knowledge rather than in the formal requirements of religious law.

This form of religious engagement is consistent with the broader intellectual commitment to honest inquiry over conformity that characterizes the tradition as a whole. Just as Sofa the intellectual refused to conform to the political and social expectations of the Bangladeshi intellectual establishment, Sofa the person of faith refused to conform to the external requirements of orthodox religious practice while maintaining a genuine and intense engagement with the spiritual dimensions of the Islamic tradition that those external requirements were supposed to serve.

57.2 The Essay on the Bengali Muslim Mind as Spiritual and Historical Analysis

Sofa's landmark essay *Bangali Musalmaner Man*, discussed at length in Part Five, can be re-read in light of the tradition's engagement with religion as not merely a sociological and historical analysis but as a form of spiritual analysis: an attempt to understand the specific spiritual formation of Bengali Muslim consciousness, to identify the specific spiritual resources that the Bengali Muslim tradition contains, and to diagnose the specific spiritual failures and distortions that have prevented those resources from being more fully realized in the cultural and political life of Bangladesh.

This spiritual reading of the essay is not inconsistent with its sociological reading; rather, it reveals a dimension of the essay that purely sociological interpretation misses. When Sofa traces the history of Bengali Muslim consciousness and identifies in it a tendency toward a certain kind of passivity, a certain deferral of genuine self-determination in favor of dependence on external authorities whether colonial, political, or religious, he is not merely describing a sociological phenomenon. He is diagnosing a specific spiritual failure: the failure to claim the inner freedom and the genuine self-determination that the spiritual tradition he is drawing on, the Sufi tradition of self-knowledge and divine love, identifies as the purpose and the highest achievement of human spiritual development.

Sofa's solution to this spiritual failure is not a return to orthodox religious practice or a program of religious revival in any conventional sense. It is the same solution that the tradition consistently offers for political and cultural failures: the cultivation of intellectual honesty, genuine self-examination, and the courage to face uncomfortable truths about one's own condition and one's own history. In the spiritual domain as in the intellectual domain, Sofa insists that genuine transformation requires passing through the discomfort of honest self-knowledge rather than seeking the consolations of communal solidarity or religious conformity.

57.3 The Devotional Tradition in Bengali Muslim Literature

Sofa's specific engagement with the devotional dimension of Bengali Muslim literary and musical tradition is one of the least studied aspects of his intellectual work but one of the most revealing. His appreciation for the Baul tradition and for the devotional poetry of the Islamic mystical tradition was not merely aesthetic appreciation; it was a form of spiritual recognition, an acknowledgment that the specific modes of spiritual expression that these traditions had developed over centuries contained genuine insights about the human condition that the more discursive forms of intellectual analysis could not fully capture.

The specific musical and poetic forms of the Bengali devotional tradition, from the Baul songs of Lalon Shah through the devotional poetry of Hasan Raja to the rural traditions of Murshidi and Marfati song, all represent forms of religious expression that are simultaneously deeply rooted in the Bengali cultural tradition and genuinely spiritual in their content and their aspiration. These forms are not the Islam of legal formalism and doctrinal orthodoxy; they are forms of spiritual expression that have developed in the specific cultural conditions of Bengal and that reflect the specific spiritual needs and the specific spiritual resources of the Bengali Muslim population in ways that imported forms of Islamic practice and Islamic political organization cannot replicate.

Sofa's appreciation for these forms of spiritual expression is connected to his broader intellectual commitment to the Bengali cultural tradition as the primary resource for the development of a genuinely Bangladeshi culture. Just as he argued in the cultural domain that Bangladesh's intellectual and cultural development required drawing on its own cultural resources rather than simply importing frameworks from outside, he argued implicitly in the spiritual domain that Bangladesh's genuine religious life was rooted in its own specific traditions of spiritual expression and that the attempt to replace those traditions with imported forms of religious orthodoxy was both culturally destructive and spiritually impoverishing.

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT: LALON SHAH AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION OF SPIRITUAL DISSENT

The Mystic as Social Critic and the Politics of Inner Freedom

58.1 Lalon's Philosophy of the Human Body

Lalon Shah's philosophical system, if the informal and deliberately anti-systematic body of his songs can be called a system, centers on the philosophy of the human body as the site of all spiritual knowledge and all genuine self-knowledge. His famous metaphor of the *moner manush*, the human being within the human being, the inner person who is the true self and whose nature contains within it the nature of the divine, is the central organizing principle of a spiritual philosophy that refuses to locate the divine exclusively in scripture, in doctrine, or in external religious authority, and that insists instead on the possibility and the necessity of direct spiritual self-knowledge.

This philosophy has obvious connections to the broader Sufi tradition, particularly the specific Sufi tradition of Bengal that was rooted in the teachings of the major Sufi orders that established themselves in Bengal from the thirteenth century onward. But Lalon's development of these Sufi insights is genuinely original in its specific articulation and in its explicit critique of the religious authorities of his time, both Hindu and Muslim, who he regarded as having replaced genuine spiritual experience with the performance of ritual observance and the enforcement of doctrinal conformity.

The political dimensions of Lalon's spiritual philosophy are not immediately obvious but are genuinely important for the tradition's engagement with religion. His insistence on the equal spiritual dignity of all human beings, regardless of their caste, their religion, or their social position, is a straightforwardly egalitarian political position expressed in spiritual terms. His critique of the caste system and of the Muslim social hierarchies of his time, expressed through the specific medium of devotional song rather than through political manifesto, represents a form of social criticism that is simultaneously more radical in its implications and more enduring in its cultural influence than most of the explicitly political social criticism produced in the same period.

58.2 Lalon's Reception in the Tradition and in Contemporary Bangladesh

Salimullah Khan's sustained engagement with Lalon Shah is one of the most productive intersections between the tradition's theoretical framework and the Bengali cultural tradition. Khan has argued that Lalon represents a form of philosophical and political radicalism that is genuinely indigenous to the Bengali tradition and that provides resources for social and political criticism that are not available in either the imported frameworks of Western critical theory or the orthodox forms of Islamic political thought.

The specifically anti-colonial dimension of Lalon's philosophy, his critique of the British colonial order and its effects on Bengali society expressed through the indirect medium of spiritual poetry, connects to Khan's broader argument about the relationship between colonial power and cultural expression. Lalon's songs are not merely spiritual exercises; they are social documents that record and respond to the specific conditions of Bengali life under colonial rule, including the communal divisions that colonial policies were intensifying, the economic exploitation that was transforming the social conditions of rural Bengal, and the cultural hierarchies that colonial education was installing in the intellectual life of the society.

The contemporary political significance of Lalon's philosophy in the specific conditions of post-2024 Bangladesh is considerable. Ahmadiyya Muslims, Sufis, Bauls, Baha'is, indigenous peoples, and atheists are among the religious minorities whose position in Bangladesh has become increasingly precarious following the political changes of 2024. [USCIRF](#) The specific threats to Baul religious practice and to the shrines and institutions associated with the Sufi and mystic traditions of Bangladesh represent a direct attack on the dimensions of Bengali religious culture that Lalon's philosophy most fully represents. The tradition's defense of the Baul tradition and the Sufi heritage of Bengal is therefore not merely a matter of cultural aesthetics; it is a defense of a specific form of religious expression that embodies values of equality, spiritual freedom, and social justice that are central to the tradition's own normative commitments.

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE: THE ROHINGYA QUESTION AND THE TRADITION'S RESPONSE

Solidarity, Sovereignty, and the Ethics of Refugee Crisis in an Islamic Perspective

59.1 The Rohingya Crisis and Its Analytical Dimensions

The Rohingya crisis, in which approximately one million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar have been resident in camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district since the major exodus of 2017, presents the tradition's analytical framework with a genuinely difficult ethical and political question: the question of what obligations Bangladesh has toward a Muslim minority community persecuted by a neighboring Buddhist-majority state, and how those obligations should be balanced against the practical constraints of Bangladesh's own limited resources and its complex geopolitical situation.

The tradition's engagement with the Rohingya question connects to its broader analytical framework in several ways. The Rohingya are a Muslim community denied recognition as a

legitimate ethnic and national community by the Myanmar state, subjected to what international observers have described as ethnic cleansing and possibly genocide, and forced by this persecution into Bangladesh, a country that shares their religious identity but not their ethnicity and that has its own profound economic and social challenges. Their situation raises the question of what the specific content of Islamic solidarity requires in practical political terms, and how the framework of human rights and international law that the tradition has generally endorsed relates to the specific obligations of an Islamic moral framework.

Khan's analysis of communalism has also touched upon the Rohingya question. [Wikipedia](#) Khan's approach to the Rohingya question is consistent with his broader analytical framework: he locates the persecution of the Rohingya in the specific historical conditions of Myanmar's colonial and post-colonial development, including the British colonial construction of ethnic categories that positioned the Rohingya as foreigners in the territory where they had lived for generations, and he connects the Rohingya crisis to the broader dynamics of religious nationalism and ethnic exclusion that the tradition's framework has consistently analyzed.

59.2 Islamic Solidarity and National Interest: The Analytical Tension

The Rohingya crisis has generated a specific tension in Bangladeshi political discourse between the claim of Islamic solidarity, the argument that Bangladesh as a Muslim-majority country has a special obligation to protect and accommodate Muslim refugees from persecution, and the claim of national interest, the argument that the specific burdens that the Rohingya refugee population imposes on a poor and densely populated country cannot be sustained indefinitely and that Bangladesh's own development and its own poor population's interests must take priority.

The tradition's analytical framework does not resolve this tension by simply privileging one side over the other. Its commitment to the universality of human rights means that it cannot simply dismiss the claims of Rohingya refugees on grounds of national interest. But its analytical realism means that it cannot simply affirm the obligation of Islamic solidarity without engaging with the practical constraints and the geopolitical complexities that make that solidarity difficult to sustain. The tradition's framework insists on maintaining both dimensions of the analysis simultaneously rather than simplifying the problem by reducing it to either a straightforward humanitarian obligation or a straightforward calculation of national interest.

The specific contribution that the tradition makes to the Rohingya analysis is its insistence on the structural dimensions of the crisis: the ways in which the Rohingya persecution is connected to broader patterns of religious nationalism, ethnic exclusion, and state violence that require structural political responses rather than merely humanitarian ones. The provision of refugee camps and humanitarian assistance, while necessary, is not sufficient to address a crisis whose causes are rooted in the specific political conditions of Myanmar's political development, in the geopolitical interests of major powers whose relationships with Myanmar constrain the international community's ability to pressure for genuine political solutions, and in the specific failures of the international human rights regime to provide effective protection for persecuted minorities.

59.3 The Local Social Dynamics of the Rohingya Presence

The tradition's analytical framework also insists on engaging honestly with the specific social dynamics of the Rohingya presence in Cox's Bazar and the surrounding areas of southeastern Bangladesh. The presence of approximately one million refugees in a relatively small geographic area has created specific social strains, including competition for economic resources, environmental degradation, security challenges, and the disruption of local social structures, that the tradition's framework acknowledges as genuinely significant even as it maintains the fundamental commitment to the equal human dignity of the Rohingya refugees.

This honest engagement with the social dynamics of the refugee crisis is not an excuse for hostility toward the Rohingya or for the denial of their basic rights. It is rather the kind of analytical honesty that the tradition consistently demands: the recognition that genuinely difficult situations involve genuine trade-offs and genuine tensions between legitimate competing interests, and that these tensions cannot be resolved by simple moral formulas but require sustained engagement with the specific conditions and the specific stakeholders involved.

CHAPTER SIXTY: THE TRADITION, RELIGION, AND THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF 2026

Islam, Democracy, and the Continuing Challenge of Genuine Coexistence

60.1 What the Tradition's Framework Demands in the Current Moment

The political landscape of Bangladesh in 2026 presents the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan with a set of challenges in the domain of religion and politics that are more acute and more complex than any it has faced in the decades of its development. The post-2024 political transformation, which has simultaneously delegitimized the authoritarian secular nationalism of the Hasina period and opened political space for Islamist formations of varying character and political commitment, has created conditions in which the tradition's framework is more urgently needed and more practically difficult to apply than at any previous moment.

The urgency derives from the genuine significance of the choices being made in 2026 for the long-term religious and political character of Bangladesh. The constitutional reform agenda, the electoral outcomes, the institutional decisions about the relationship between Islamic law and civil law, the treatment of religious minorities, and the political engagement or non-engagement of the major Islamist formations with democratic norms and democratic processes, will all shape the conditions of Bangladeshi religious and political life for the generation that follows. Getting these choices right, or more precisely, making them in conditions of genuine democratic deliberation with adequate attention to the full range of values and interests at stake, requires precisely the kind of analytical rigor, historical perspective, and ethical commitment that the tradition has consistently modeled.

The practical difficulty derives from the specific political dynamics of the current moment: the delegitimation of the Awami League's secular nationalism by its years of authoritarian practice, the organizational weakness of secular and left-wing political formations, the demonstrated

mobilization capacity of Islamist organizations, and the specific political incentives that the current situation creates for political opportunism rather than principled engagement. The tradition's consistent demand for intellectual honesty and political independence is particularly difficult to maintain in conditions where the political landscape creates strong pressures toward alignment with one or another of the major political forces, and where the cost of genuine independence is political marginalization rather than recognition.

60.2 The Specific Analytical Positions the Tradition Maintains

Against this background, the tradition's analytical framework maintains several specific positions that are worth articulating clearly.

First, the tradition maintains that Islamic identity and democratic governance are not inherently incompatible, and that the claim that Bangladeshis must choose between being genuinely Muslim and being genuinely democratic is both historically false and politically dangerous. The history of Islamic civilization contains genuine democratic traditions, and the specific history of Bengal contains genuine resources for a form of democratic political life that is compatible with Islamic identity.

Second, the tradition maintains that specific political formations that claim Islamic identity, including Jamaat-e-Islami and the organizations associated with it, must be evaluated not on the basis of their religious identity but on the basis of their specific political commitments: their treatment of democratic norms and democratic processes, their approach to religious minorities, their position on women's rights, and their relationship to the founding values of the liberation struggle. Khan has argued that Jamaat should not be trusted if it one day adopts secularism because they have always been on the wrong side, being in a wrong structure. [BD News 24](#) This structural critique is the tradition's most sophisticated contribution to the analysis of political Islam in Bangladesh.

Third, the tradition maintains that the Sufi heritage of Bengal, including the Baul tradition and the syncretic forms of Islamic practice that have characterized Bengali Muslim religious life for centuries, represents an authentic dimension of the Islamic tradition in Bangladesh that must be defended against both the external imposition of Salafi or Wahhabi orthodoxies and the secular dismissal that treats these traditions as merely folkloric rather than as genuinely spiritual and culturally important.

Fourth, and perhaps most fundamentally, the tradition maintains that the development of genuine democratic governance in Bangladesh requires a form of religious pluralism that goes beyond formal tolerance and that involves genuine respect for the equal rights and equal dignity of all religious communities, including the Hindu minority community, the Buddhist communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Christian communities, and the Ahmadiyya community, whose position in Bangladesh has been particularly precarious and whose rights have been particularly inadequately protected by the institutions of the Bangladeshi state.

60.3 The Tradition's Contribution to the Future of Religion in Bangladesh

The most important contribution that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan makes to the question of religion and politics in Bangladesh is not a specific policy position or a specific constitutional formula. It is a way of thinking about the relationship between religion, culture, and democratic politics that refuses the simplifications of both secular dismissal and religious exclusivism, that takes seriously the genuine importance of Islamic identity for the great majority of Bangladeshis while insisting on the equal dignity and equal rights of all citizens regardless of religious identity, and that draws on the specific resources of the Bengali intellectual and cultural tradition, including its own forms of Sufi spirituality and Islamic philosophy, to develop a framework for religious and political coexistence that is genuinely indigenous rather than simply imported from Western secular models.

This contribution is not merely theoretical. It is a practical contribution to the development of the intellectual culture and the democratic political culture that genuine constitutional governance requires. The tradition's persistent modeling of honest intellectual engagement with difficult religious and political questions, its refusal to seek the easy consolations of partisan religious identity on the one hand or dismissive secularist superiority on the other, and its consistent insistence on the equal value of all human beings and all human communities regardless of their religious affiliation, represents a form of public intellectual practice that is urgently needed in the Bangladesh of 2026.

SUMMARY OF PART SIX

Part Six has conducted the most sustained and systematic examination yet of the tradition's engagement with the domain of religion, Islam, and the politics of religious identity in Bangladesh. Beginning with the fundamental analytical difficulty of engaging honestly with religion from within a framework committed to critical reason, the analysis traced the tradition's distinctive third path between secular dismissal and uncritical affirmation, examining the specific resources that each of the three major figures has brought to this difficult terrain.

The analysis examined the Sufi heritage of Bengal as the historical foundation of the specific form of Islam that has characterized Bengali Muslim religious life, with particular attention to Lalon Shah and the Baul tradition as resources for an alternative Islamic imagination that is simultaneously spiritually genuine and politically egalitarian. It traced the constitutional history of secularism in Bangladesh from the founding promise of the 1972 constitution through its subsequent erosion, examining both the genuine achievements and the genuine failures of successive political formations in navigating the relationship between Islamic identity and democratic governance.

The analysis engaged with the specific institutional dimension of the madrasa question, examining Khan's controversial support for Qawmi recognition and the broader question of the relationship between traditional Islamic education and the educational framework required for genuine democratic citizenship. It traced Khan's analysis of the colonial origins of communalism and examined the specific analytical tools that the tradition provides for thinking about the rise of Islamist political formations in the post-2024 political landscape.

The central analytical finding of Part Six is that the tradition's engagement with religion is neither a defense of secularist dismissal nor an accommodation to Islamist political pressure, but a sustained attempt to develop a framework for thinking about religion and politics in the specific conditions of Bangladesh that is simultaneously analytically rigorous and culturally grounded: a framework that takes Islamic tradition seriously as a resource for the genuine development of Bengali Muslim culture and politics while insisting on the equal dignity and equal rights of all citizens and on the democratic values that the liberation struggle expressed. This framework is the tradition's most important contribution to the specific religious and political challenges of Bangladesh in 2026, and its adequate development remains one of the most urgent tasks of Bangladeshi intellectual life.

Part Seven will address the comparative dimensions of the tradition's analytical framework, examining how the intellectual project of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan relates to comparable intellectual traditions in other postcolonial societies, and what the comparative perspective reveals about both the universality of the questions the tradition engages with and the specificity of the Bangladeshi conditions within which it has developed those questions.

End of Part Six

PART SEVEN

THE WORLD TRADITION AND THE BANGLADESHI MIND: COMPARATIVE DIMENSIONS, GLOBAL INTELLECTUAL AFFINITIES, AND THE SPECIFICITY OF A POSTCOLONIAL PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECT

PREFATORY NOTE TO PART SEVEN

The analytical project of Parts One through Six has been, of necessity, largely internal. It has traced the biographies, the intellectual formations, the philosophical commitments, the political engagements, the controversies, the mutual relationships, the ethical dimensions, and the historical significance of Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan within the specific context of Bangladesh and the broader context of Bengali intellectual life. That internal focus was deliberate and necessary. To understand these three figures, one must first understand the world within which they thought, the tradition within which they worked, and the specific problems that animated their intellectual energies across the span of more than seven decades.

But intellectual traditions do not exist in isolation. They are formed by contact, by reading, by influence, by argument, and by the productive encounter with ways of thinking that emerge from different conditions and different historical experiences. The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has always been a tradition in dialogue with the world: with British socialism through Harold Laski, with French existentialism through the works that Sofa encountered and transformed, with Lacanian psychoanalysis and Marxist political economy through Khan's sustained theoretical engagement, with the African postcolonial tradition through Frantz Fanon, with the Latin American dependency theorists, with the Islamic modernist tradition, and with the vast and

complex intellectual heritage of South Asia beyond Bangladesh. To understand the tradition fully, one must understand these dialogues: where they began, how they developed, what the tradition took from each encounter and what it refused, and what the comparative perspective reveals about both the universality of the questions the tradition has engaged and the irreducible specificity of the conditions within which it has engaged them.

This is the work of Part Seven. It is, necessarily, a different kind of work from what has preceded it. Parts One through Six were largely reconstructive: they attempted to recover, articulate, and systematize a tradition that has often expressed itself in indirect, fragmentary, or oral forms. Part Seven is comparative and synthetic: it places that recovered tradition in conversation with the world intellectual traditions to which it is most closely related, examines what those comparisons reveal, and draws conclusions about the nature and significance of the Bangladeshi philosophical project that emerge from the comparative analysis.

The chapters of Part Seven proceed through a series of comparative engagements, each examining the relationship between the Razzaq-Sofa-Khan tradition and a specific strand of world intellectual thought. The analysis begins with the closest comparisons, the South Asian intellectual traditions within which the three figures were most immediately embedded, and moves outward through the African postcolonial tradition, the Latin American critical tradition, the Islamic philosophical and political tradition in its global dimensions, the European critical theory tradition, and the global feminist philosophical tradition. Each comparative analysis is followed by an assessment of what the comparison reveals about the specific character of the Bangladeshi tradition and its contribution to the global intellectual project of thinking through the conditions and possibilities of postcolonial modernity.

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE: THE COMPARATIVE METHOD AND ITS CHALLENGES IN POSTCOLONIAL INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

Methodological Foundations for a Cross-Cultural Philosophical Analysis

61.1 Why Comparison Is Both Necessary and Dangerous

The comparative method in intellectual history is both indispensable and treacherous. It is indispensable because intellectual traditions, however rooted in specific local conditions, are always formed partly through contact with ideas from other traditions, and because the significance of any particular intellectual project can often only be seen clearly when it is placed in comparative perspective. The specific contribution that the Razzaq-Sofa-Khan tradition makes to the global project of thinking through postcolonial modernity is not visible until we know what other traditions have attempted the same project, how they have proceeded, where they have succeeded and failed, and how the Bangladeshi approach compares with and differs from those other attempts.

At the same time, the comparative method is treacherous because comparison always involves a risk of false equivalence, of assimilating the specific to the general in ways that obscure precisely

the local conditions and specific historical experiences that give any intellectual tradition its distinctive character. When we compare Salimullah Khan to Frantz Fanon, for example, we must be careful not to reduce Khan to a Bangladeshi version of Fanon, not to treat the parallels between their analyses of colonial psychology and postcolonial cultural alienation as evidence that Khan is merely derivative of Fanon rather than engaged in a related but genuinely independent intellectual project rooted in different conditions and addressing different problems.

The challenge is to conduct comparative analysis that is genuinely illuminating, that reveals what the comparison shows about both traditions, without falling into either of two opposed errors: the error of assimilation, which flattens genuine differences in the name of universal categories, and the error of particularism, which refuses comparison altogether in the name of the irreducible uniqueness of each tradition. The best intellectual history navigates between these two errors by maintaining a double focus: always asking both what the comparison reveals about what is shared and what it reveals about what is distinctive, and treating both dimensions of the comparison as equally important.

This is the approach that Part Seven will attempt to maintain throughout its comparative analyses. Each comparison is pursued in the conviction that it reveals something genuinely illuminating about the Bangladeshi tradition that could not be seen without it, while each comparison is also conducted with the awareness that its illuminating power has limits, that there is always a remainder that the comparison cannot capture, and that the remainder is often the most important part.

61.2 The Specific Comparative Framework Appropriate to the Tradition

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is not a tradition that can be compared to just anything. It has specific intellectual affinities, specific theoretical debts, and specific concerns that make some comparisons more productive than others. The framework for selecting and organizing the comparative analyses in Part Seven is based on an assessment of the intellectual genealogy of the tradition: which thinkers have directly influenced it, which traditions have provided it with theoretical resources, and which intellectual projects are engaged in sufficiently similar questions that comparative analysis is genuinely productive even in the absence of direct influence.

The most productive comparisons fall into several categories. First, there are the South Asian comparisons: the intellectual traditions of India and Pakistan that share with Bangladesh a common colonial history, a common cultural and linguistic inheritance, and many of the same structural problems of postcolonial political development, while differing in important ways in their specific religious, linguistic, and political conditions. Second, there are the African comparisons: the postcolonial intellectual tradition associated with Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and their contemporaries, a tradition that grapples with questions of colonial psychology, cultural decolonization, and political independence that are structurally analogous to those addressed by the Bangladeshi tradition. Third, there are the Latin American comparisons: the dependency theory tradition, the liberation theology movement, the pedagogy of Paulo Freire, and the cultural criticism associated with figures like Jose Carlos Mariategui and Orlando Fals Borda, all of which engage with the relationship between colonial economic structures and postcolonial political possibilities in ways

that parallel the Bangladeshi tradition's engagement with similar questions. Fourth, there are the Islamic intellectual comparisons: the tradition of Islamic modernism associated with figures like Mohammed Iqbal, Ali Shariati, Malek Bennabi, and their predecessors and successors, which grapples with the relationship between Islamic identity and modern political and intellectual life in ways that bear directly on the concerns of the Bangladeshi tradition. Fifth, there are the European critical theory comparisons: the Frankfurt School tradition, the Gramscian tradition, the structuralist and post-structuralist traditions, and the various strands of Marxist political theory that have provided the Bangladeshi tradition with many of its most important analytical tools, while also presenting it with problems of cultural translation and intellectual adaptation that are themselves philosophically significant. Sixth, there are the feminist philosophical comparisons: the global tradition of feminist critical theory that the Bangladeshi tradition has engaged with in complex and sometimes contentious ways, raising important questions about the relationship between anticolonial politics and gender politics that remain unresolved in the tradition and in Bangladeshi intellectual life more broadly.

Each of these comparative engagements is pursued in the chapters that follow. Together, they constitute a comparative map of the tradition's position in world intellectual life: a map that reveals both the depth of its engagement with global thought and the irreducibility of its specifically Bangladeshi and Bengali character.

61.3 The Postcolonial Intellectual and the Global Economy of Knowledge

Before proceeding to the specific comparative analyses, it is necessary to acknowledge the broader structural context within which all postcolonial intellectual traditions operate: the global economy of knowledge, the hierarchical system of intellectual production and recognition in which certain traditions, institutions, and languages occupy privileged positions while others are marginalized, discounted, or rendered invisible. This is not merely a background condition for the Bangladeshi tradition. It is one of the central problems that the tradition has explicitly analyzed and criticized.

Salimullah Khan's sustained critique of the dominance of English-language scholarship in Bangladeshi academic life is one dimension of a broader analysis of what the sociologist Raewyn Connell has called "Southern theory," the attempt by scholars from the postcolonial South to develop analytical frameworks adequate to their own conditions rather than simply applying frameworks developed in and for the conditions of the metropolitan North. Khan's argument that the Bangladeshi educational system's preference for English over Bengali is a form of continued colonial subjugation is not merely a linguistic or cultural argument. It is an epistemological argument about the conditions of knowledge production and the political significance of who gets to set the terms for what counts as valid intellectual work.

This critique connects directly to broader debates in global intellectual life about the nature of what the Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe has called the "knowledge economy" of the postcolonial world, a knowledge economy in which the institutions of the global North, including the major research universities, the leading academic journals, and the dominant publishing houses, continue to function as the primary gatekeepers of intellectual legitimacy, determining what counts as rigorous scholarship, what questions are worth asking, and what

frameworks are available for addressing them. The fact that the work of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is almost entirely unknown outside Bangladesh and among Bangladeshi diaspora communities is itself a symptom of the global knowledge economy's systematic devaluation of intellectual production in languages other than English, French, German, and a handful of other metropolitan languages, and in institutions outside the global intellectual centers.

This structural condition is not neutral. It shapes the reception of the tradition's work, the resources available to its practitioners, the audiences they can reach, and the institutional recognition they can obtain. It also shapes the tradition's own relationship to the theoretical frameworks it uses: the fact that Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marxist political economy, and postcolonial theory are primarily available in English and French texts that must be translated, adapted, and renegotiated to be useful in the Bengali context is itself a consequence of the global knowledge economy's asymmetries, and the tradition's persistent effort to navigate these asymmetries is itself a form of intellectual work that deserves recognition and analysis.

The comparative framework of Part Seven is thus not merely an exercise in intellectual history. It is also an intervention in the global knowledge economy: an attempt to make visible, to an English-reading audience, a tradition that has been systematically marginalized by the very structures it has most forcefully criticized.

CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO: THE SOUTH ASIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION AND ITS BANGLADESHI INFLECTION

Comparing the Bangladeshi Philosophical Project with Its Indian and Pakistani Counterparts

62.1 The Shared Inheritance and Its Differentiations

The intellectual tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan shares a common colonial inheritance with the intellectual traditions of India and Pakistan. All three national traditions were formed within the specific conditions of British colonial rule in South Asia: conditions that included a particular educational system, a particular administrative structure, a particular relationship between indigenous and metropolitan knowledge, and a particular set of political possibilities and constraints. All three national traditions have grappled, in their different ways, with the problems of modernity, development, democracy, and cultural identity that colonialism simultaneously created and foreclosed.

Yet the shared inheritance has been differentiated by the specific historical experiences of each national tradition. The Indian intellectual tradition, centered primarily but not exclusively on the universities of Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, and Madras, has had to contend with the specific dynamics of Hindu-majority nationalism, with the relationship between the dominant Brahminical intellectual tradition and the various subaltern traditions it has suppressed, and with the specific geopolitical position of a large state that has been simultaneously a recipient of colonial domination and a practitioner of its own forms of internal colonialism toward its

minorities, its lower castes, and its northeastern peoples. The Pakistani intellectual tradition, fragmented by the specific traumas of Pakistan's political history, including the loss of East Pakistan in 1971, military domination, Islamization, and the continuing crisis of state legitimacy, has produced a distinctive set of intellectual responses to questions of national identity, Islamic politics, and the relationship between Pakistani statehood and the diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities it claims to encompass. And the Bangladeshi intellectual tradition, formed in the crucible of the Language Movement, the Liberation War, and the specific political turbulences of postcolonial Bangladesh, has its own distinctive character that cannot be reduced to either of its South Asian counterparts.

62.2 Rabindranath Tagore and the Complex Bengali Inheritance

Any comparison of the Bangladeshi tradition with the broader South Asian intellectual landscape must begin with Rabindranath Tagore, the towering figure of Bengali literature and thought whose presence is both enabling and problematic for the tradition we are examining. Tagore is in many respects the indispensable predecessor of the Bengali intellectual tradition in both Bangladesh and West Bengal: his literary achievements, his philosophical writings, his educational experiments at Santiniketan, and his political interventions on questions of nationalism, colonialism, and the relationship between East and West have shaped the intellectual environment within which all subsequent Bengali thinkers have worked.

The tradition's relationship with Tagore is deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, Tagore represents the highest achievement of the Bengali literary and philosophical tradition, and all three of the figures at the center of this textbook have engaged seriously and respectfully with his work. Abdur Razzaq's appreciation of Tagore was part of his broader appreciation of the richness of Bengali cultural life, and he saw Tagore's contribution as one that transcended the Hindu-Muslim divide that colonial politics had tried to impose on Bengali culture. Ahmed Sofa, despite his fierce independence and his rejection of sentimental nationalism, wrote with genuine admiration about certain dimensions of Tagore's achievement, particularly his philosophical poetry and his educational ideas. Salimullah Khan has been more critical, particularly with respect to Tagore's approach to Bengali orthography, but has also written with sophistication about Tagore's engagement with the question of Indian nationalism and its limitations.

On the other hand, the tradition has also engaged critically with what it sees as the limitations of the Tagorean inheritance: its implicit assumptions about the superiority of the Hindu intellectual tradition, its romanticization of Indian village life in ways that obscured the real conditions of rural poverty and caste oppression, and its tendency to dissolve political questions into aesthetic ones in ways that were ultimately unhelpful for the project of genuine political liberation. Salimullah Khan's critique of the dominance of Tagore's linguistic preferences in contemporary Bengali usage is an example of this critical engagement: it is not a rejection of Tagore's literary achievement but an argument that Tagore's specific linguistic preferences, including his preference for Sanskritized Bengali over Arabicized or Persianized forms, cannot be treated as a neutral linguistic standard but must be understood as reflecting specific cultural and political positions that have had the effect of marginalizing the specific linguistic traditions of Bengali Muslim culture.

This is a genuinely important intellectual intervention. The Bengali language that was defended in 1952, and that has been celebrated as the foundation of Bangladeshi national identity, is not a culturally neutral medium. It is a language with a complex history of interaction between Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, and indigenous Dravidian elements, and the question of which of these strands should be privileged in the standard literary language is not a purely linguistic question. It is a cultural and political question about whose heritage counts, whose literary tradition is validated, and whose ways of speaking are treated as educated and whose are treated as vulgar or incorrect. Khan's insistence on the legitimacy of the Arabic and Persian elements of Bengali Muslim linguistic tradition is thus a contribution to the broader South Asian debate about the relationship between linguistic standardization and cultural power that has been conducted, in different forms, across the entire subcontinent.

62.3 The Subaltern Studies Group and the Bangladeshi Tradition

The most important intellectual movement in South Asian studies in the last four decades has been the Subaltern Studies collective, founded in the early 1980s by Ranajit Guha and subsequently including scholars like Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Shahid Amin, and David Hardiman. The collective's project, broadly stated, was to recover the perspectives and the histories of those who had been excluded from both colonial and nationalist historiography: the peasants, workers, women, and lower-caste communities whose experiences and agency had been systematically erased from the dominant narratives of South Asian history.

The relationship between the Subaltern Studies project and the Bangladeshi intellectual tradition is complex and underexplored. On the surface, there are significant affinities: both projects are concerned with the recovery of marginalized voices, with the critique of elite nationalism, with the analysis of colonial power and its legacies, and with the question of what genuine political agency looks like for communities that have been systematically excluded from the political and cultural mainstream. Ranajit Guha's foundational work on peasant insurgency in colonial Bengal is directly relevant to the history of the territory that became Bangladesh, and the Subaltern Studies group's broader critique of elite nationalism resonates powerfully with Ahmed Sofa's critique of Bangladeshi intellectual opportunism and Salimullah Khan's critique of the dynastic politics of the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

But there are also significant tensions between the two projects. The Subaltern Studies collective, particularly in its later, more poststructurally inflected phase associated with Dipesh Chakrabarty's "Provincializing Europe," developed a sophisticated critique of the Enlightenment universalism that underpins both liberal and Marxist political theory, arguing that the categories of historical consciousness, rational agency, and political modernity developed in Europe are inadequate to the task of understanding South Asian historical experience and must be supplemented or replaced by categories derived from indigenous cultural and religious traditions. This critique has been enormously influential in South Asian and postcolonial studies, but it sits uneasily with the Bangladeshi tradition's simultaneous commitment to the universal values of the Enlightenment, including the values of reason, equality, and democratic governance, and its critique of the specific ways in which those values have been distorted or betrayed in the postcolonial world.

Salimullah Khan's engagement with the Subaltern Studies tradition has been critical but respectful. He shares the collective's concern with the recovery of marginalized voices and with the critique of elite nationalism, but he has reservations about the poststructuralist move toward a radical skepticism about Enlightenment categories that he sees as ultimately disabling for the political project of genuine liberation. For Khan, the problem is not that reason, equality, and democratic governance are European ideas that cannot be applied to South Asian conditions. The problem is that these ideas have been consistently betrayed, distorted, and weaponized in the service of colonial and postcolonial power, and that the appropriate response is not to abandon them but to radicalize them, to insist on their application in conditions where they have been systematically denied. This is a classically Marxist response to the postmodern critique, and it reflects Khan's deep roots in the Marxist tradition even as he has engaged seriously and productively with poststructuralist and psychoanalytic frameworks.

62.4 Mohammed Iqbal, Pakistani Intellectual Thought, and the Bangladeshi Difference

The comparison with Pakistan's intellectual tradition is particularly illuminating because it reveals both the shared inheritance and the specific divergences that have resulted from the different historical experiences of the two nations. Pakistan's intellectual tradition has been deeply shaped by the legacy of Mohammed Iqbal, the poet-philosopher whose *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (1930) remains one of the most ambitious attempts in the twentieth century to develop a synthesis of Islamic theology, European philosophy, and South Asian cultural traditions that could serve as the philosophical foundation for a modern Muslim state.

Iqbal's project has obvious points of contact with the concerns of the Bangladeshi tradition. His critique of the stagnation of Islamic thought, his insistence on the need for *ijtihad*, the independent exercise of rational judgment in Islamic jurisprudence, his engagement with Bergson, Nietzsche, and Hegel, and his argument that Islamic spirituality contains within it the resources for a genuinely modern form of political and cultural life, all resonate with aspects of the Bangladeshi tradition's engagement with the relationship between Islamic identity and modern thought. Salimullah Khan's sustained engagement with the Islamic philosophical tradition, including his attention to the specific resources of Sufi spirituality and Islamic political philosophy, has parallels with Iqbal's project even though Khan has not, to my knowledge, written at length about Iqbal himself.

But the differences are equally significant. Iqbal's project was explicitly pan-Islamic in its orientation: it was concerned with the renewal of Islamic civilization as a whole, not with the specific conditions of any particular Muslim national community. This pan-Islamic orientation has had mixed consequences for Pakistan's intellectual tradition, sometimes producing genuinely sophisticated attempts to think about the relationship between Islamic identity and modern political life, and sometimes producing a form of Islamic nationalism that has been used to justify the suppression of the specific cultural, linguistic, and political identities of Pakistan's diverse non-Punjabi, non-Urdu-speaking communities, including the Bengalis of East Pakistan.

The Bangladeshi tradition, by contrast, has always been rooted in the specific conditions of Bengali Muslim cultural life, and has developed its engagement with Islamic thought from within those specific conditions rather than from a pan-Islamic perspective that abstracts away

from cultural particularity. This difference in orientation is not merely a difference in scale or geographic scope. It reflects a fundamental difference in the understanding of what Islamic identity means and what it requires. For the Bangladeshi tradition, Islamic identity is never separable from Bengali cultural identity, from the specific history of Islam in Bengal, from the specific forms of Sufi spirituality and syncretic practice that have characterized Bengali Muslim religious life, and from the specific political and cultural conditions of the territory that became Bangladesh. This rootedness in the particular is one of the Bangladeshi tradition's most distinctive and most valuable characteristics, and it is something that the comparison with the more universalist Islamic intellectual traditions of Pakistan and the Arab world serves to illuminate precisely by contrast.

62.5 Ambedkar, Periyar, and the Caste Question as a Limit Case

No comparative analysis of the Bangladeshi tradition's relationship to the broader South Asian intellectual landscape can be complete without engaging with the intellectual traditions associated with the anti-caste movements: the tradition of B. R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution and the most powerful theorist of caste oppression in South Asian history, and the Dravidian intellectual tradition associated with Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, whose critique of Brahminical Hindu culture and whose advocacy for the dignity and rights of the lower castes of Tamil Nadu represent one of the most radical intellectual interventions in the history of South Asian thought.

The Bangladeshi tradition has not engaged extensively with either Ambedkar or Periyar. This relative neglect is itself revealing. Caste, in the Hindu sense of a hereditary social hierarchy rooted in religious ideology and enforced by social exclusion, is not a major organizing principle of Bangladeshi Muslim society in the way it is of Hindu-majority Indian society. This does not mean that Bangladesh is free of social hierarchy or of forms of discrimination rooted in birth and social status: the ashraf-atrap distinction within Bengali Muslim society, the difference between those of claimed Arab or Persian descent and those of indigenous Bengali origin, has historically functioned as a form of social stratification that parallels certain features of caste hierarchy, and the discrimination against the scheduled castes and lower-caste Hindu communities within Bangladesh is a significant and underanalyzed dimension of Bangladeshi social life.

But the specific form of the caste problem in Bangladesh is different from its form in India, and the intellectual frameworks developed by Ambedkar and Periyar to address the specifically Hindu caste hierarchy do not translate directly to the Bangladeshi context. What is significant for our purposes is that the relative absence of a sustained engagement with the anti-caste intellectual tradition in the work of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan represents a gap in the tradition's coverage that subsequent thinkers in the Bangladeshi tradition will need to address. The tradition's critique of social hierarchy and its defense of the equal dignity of all human beings is explicitly committed in principle to the elimination of all forms of birth-based social discrimination, but its specific analysis of the social structures within Bangladesh has not always given adequate attention to the specific forms of discrimination that affect the lower-caste Hindu communities and other marginalized groups within the country.

This is a critique that can be made of the tradition from within its own framework, using the tradition's own commitments to equality and human dignity against its relative neglect of specific forms of social exclusion. It is a productive critique precisely because it does not require abandoning the tradition's fundamental commitments but rather extending and deepening their application to dimensions of Bangladeshi social life that the tradition has not adequately addressed.

CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE: THE AFRICAN POSTCOLONIAL TRADITION AND ITS RESONANCES WITH THE BANGLADESHI PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECT

Fanon, Cabral, Senghor, Ngugi, and the Parallel Projects of Cultural Decolonization

63.1 Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Colonial Subjugation

Frantz Fanon is the African thinker who has been most directly influential on the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, and the comparison between Fanon's intellectual project and the Bangladeshi tradition is one of the most productive that the comparative framework of Part Seven has to offer. Fanon, born in Martinique in 1925 and trained as a psychiatrist in France, developed through his experiences as a physician working with both colonizer and colonized in Algeria a theory of colonial psychology that remains one of the most powerful analytical frameworks available for understanding the psychological dimensions of colonial domination and its aftermath.

Fanon's central contribution to the analysis of colonial psychology, developed across his three major works, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (1952), *L'An V de la Revolution Algerienne* (1959), and *Les Damnes de la Terre* (1961), is his argument that colonialism does not merely exploit the colonized economically and dominate them politically. It also damages them psychologically, producing in the colonized subject a profound ambivalence about their own identity, a simultaneous desire to identify with the colonizer and shame at their own cultural inheritance, and an internalization of the colonizer's contempt for the colonized that Fanon analyses with clinical precision. The colonized subject, in Fanon's analysis, is not simply oppressed from without. They are also divided within, torn between the cultural world of their inheritance and the cultural world of the colonizer, unable to be fully at home in either, and prone to forms of psychological breakdown, political violence, and cultural mimicry that are all responses to this fundamental condition of colonial ambivalence.

The resonances between Fanon's analysis and the concerns of the Bangladeshi tradition are immediately apparent. Ahmed Sofa's critique of Bangladeshi intellectuals as servile opportunists who lack the courage to speak truth to power is a version of Fanon's critique of the colonized intellectual class that has internalized the colonizer's values and reproduces colonial hierarchies in the guise of postcolonial nationalism. Salimullah Khan's critique of the Bangladeshi ruling class's preference for English over Bengali, his argument that their acts and thoughts do not reflect their words and that they are in a psychoanalytic sense perverse, is a direct application of

Fanonist insights to the specific Bangladeshi context, inflected through the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework that Khan has made his own.

Salimullah Khan has explicitly engaged with Fanon's work, translating Fanon's *Les Damnés de la Terre* into Bengali, a translation that represents a significant scholarly achievement and a deliberate political act: the bringing of Fanon's radical anticolonial analysis into the Bengali intellectual space, making it available to readers who engage with ideas primarily in their mother tongue rather than in the European languages in which most global intellectual discourse is conducted. This act of translation is itself a form of intellectual engagement with the Fanonist project, an attempt to demonstrate in practice the possibility of the decolonization of knowledge that Fanon advocated in theory.

But the comparison also reveals important differences between the Fanonist framework and the Bangladeshi tradition. Fanon's analysis of colonial psychology is grounded in the specific conditions of French colonialism in Algeria and the French Antilles, conditions that are importantly different from the conditions of British colonialism in Bengal. The specific racial dynamics of French colonialism, the particular ways in which French colonial ideology constructed the relationship between French civilization and African or Antillean cultures, and the specific political context of the Algerian revolution within which *The Wretched of the Earth* was written, all give Fanon's analysis a specific character that cannot be directly applied to the Bangladeshi context without significant adaptation.

More significantly, Fanon's political trajectory, from the relatively optimistic psychoanalytic humanism of *Black Skin, White Masks* to the revolutionary violence and national consciousness of *The Wretched of the Earth*, reflects a specific political context, the armed struggle for Algerian independence, that has no direct parallel in the Bangladeshi experience. The Bangladeshi Liberation War of 1971 was certainly an armed struggle, and it produced its own forms of political violence and revolutionary consciousness. But its specific character, as a struggle for national liberation against a state, Pakistan, that was itself a postcolonial entity and that claimed an Islamic identity shared by the majority of the Bengali population it was attempting to suppress, is different enough from the Algerian context that the comparison must be handled with considerable care.

The most productive use of the Fanon comparison is not to treat the Bangladeshi tradition as a South Asian version of Fanonism but to use the comparison to illuminate the specific dimensions of the colonial legacy that the Bangladeshi tradition has addressed and those that it has left underanalyzed. Fanon's emphasis on the violence of decolonization, his argument that the colonial situation is one of radical violence in which the colonized subject cannot achieve genuine liberation without engaging in counterviolence that is not merely political but also psychological, raises questions for the Bangladeshi tradition that it has not fully answered. The tradition's analysis of the psychological dimensions of colonial domination, its critique of the colonized intellectual's self-contempt and cultural mimicry, is Fanonist in its essential impulse. But the tradition's political framework, its commitment to democratic governance and peaceful political change, sits in some tension with the Fanonist analysis of the necessity of revolutionary violence, and this tension has not been adequately worked through within the tradition.

63.2 Amilcar Cabral and the Question of Culture and Liberation

Amilcar Cabral, the theorist and leader of the Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde independence movements, offers a somewhat different set of parallels with the Bangladeshi tradition. Cabral's contribution to the theory of anticolonial liberation is his analysis of the relationship between culture and political liberation, his argument that the preservation and development of indigenous cultural traditions is not merely a matter of cultural pride but a fundamental condition of political liberation, because colonialism works not only by exploiting the colonized economically and dominating them politically but also by destroying or suppressing their cultural traditions and thereby undermining their capacity for collective agency and self-organization.

Cabral's famous statement that culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people's history and a determinant of history expresses a view that is closely parallel to the Bangladeshi tradition's understanding of the relationship between Bengali cultural life and Bangladeshi political development. The tradition's insistence on the importance of Bengali language, Bengali literary culture, Bangladeshi historical memory, and the specific forms of Sufi spirituality and syncretic religious practice that have characterized Bengali Muslim life, is not merely cultural conservatism. It is a political argument, parallel to Cabral's, about the conditions of genuine political liberation: the argument that a people who have lost confidence in their own cultural traditions, who have internalized the colonial verdict on the worthlessness of their language and their ways of being in the world, cannot be genuinely free even after they have achieved formal political independence.

Cabral also raises, in a particularly acute form, the question of what he calls the "return to the source," the process by which the postcolonial intellectual class, which has been educated in the colonial tradition and thereby alienated from its own people, must undertake a deliberate process of reengagement with the cultural life and political struggles of the popular classes if it is to play a genuinely liberatory political role. This analysis connects directly to Ahmed Sofa's critique of Bangladeshi intellectuals and to his insistence that the genuine intellectual must be willing to speak truth to power on behalf of the people rather than serving the interests of the ruling class. It also connects to the broader question of the relationship between intellectual work and popular struggle that runs through the tradition's self-understanding: the question of what it means to be an intellectual committed to the liberation of the people in a society where the intellectual class has been systematically separated from popular culture and popular politics by the colonial educational system.

63.3 Senghor, Negritude, and the Limits of Cultural Essentialism

The Negritude movement, associated primarily with Leopold Sedar Senghor, Aime Cesaire, and Leon-Gontran Damas, represents a different kind of response to colonialism: not the revolutionary politics of Fanon and Cabral but a celebration of African cultural values as an alternative to the dominant European civilization. Senghor's particular form of Negritude, developed across his literary and philosophical writings from the 1930s through the 1970s, argued for the existence of a distinctively African mode of being and knowing, characterized by what he called "emotion as the African's mode of knowledge," a way of engaging with the world that he contrasted with the analytical rationalism of European thought.

The comparison with the Bangladeshi tradition here is instructive primarily as a negative comparison: the Bangladeshi tradition has consistently avoided the kind of cultural essentialism that characterizes Negritude in its Senghorian form. The tradition does not argue that Bangladeshis or Bengali Muslims have a distinctive mode of consciousness or a distinctive way of knowing that is incompatible with or superior to the rationalist frameworks of European thought. On the contrary, it has consistently engaged with European intellectual traditions, including Enlightenment rationalism, Marxist political economy, and psychoanalysis, as genuinely useful analytical tools, while insisting that these tools must be adapted to and used within the specific conditions of Bangladeshi life rather than being imported wholesale and applied without modification.

This difference between the Bangladeshi tradition and Negritude is philosophically significant. The Negritude movement, despite its genuine achievement as a cultural and political intervention, ultimately rested on an essentialist conception of African or Black identity that was itself a mirror image of the colonial racism it was opposing: where colonialism had constructed an essential African nature as inferior, Negritude constructed an essential African nature as different and in some ways superior. This move, however psychologically understandable as a response to colonial contempt, ultimately reinforced the racial categories of colonial thought rather than dismantling them. The Bangladeshi tradition's consistent refusal of cultural essentialism, its insistence on analyzing Bengali Muslim identity as a historically formed and historically contingent set of cultural practices rather than as an essential or given nature, represents a more adequate theoretical response to the problem of colonial identity, even if it is sometimes more difficult to sustain politically than the celebratory essentialism of Negritude.

Aime Cesaire is a more complex case. His *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), with its fierce analysis of colonialism as barbarism and its insistence on the complicity of European humanism in colonial violence, is much closer in spirit to the Bangladeshi tradition's critical engagement with colonial history than Senghor's celebration of African essence. Cesaire's anticolonialism is political and economic in its primary orientation rather than cultural and essentialist, and his insistence that colonialism cannot be redeemed or reformed but must be completely overthrown is a position that resonates with the Bangladeshi tradition's rejection of the various forms of neocolonial accommodation that it has consistently identified and criticized.

63.4 Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Language Question

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan writer and cultural critic who made the deliberate and politically charged decision in the early 1980s to abandon English and write exclusively in his mother tongue Gikuyu, represents perhaps the most direct parallel with the Bangladeshi tradition's engagement with the language question. Ngugi's *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), written in English as a farewell to the English language, articulates a position on the relationship between language and colonialism that is strikingly similar to the position developed independently by Salimullah Khan in the Bengali context.

For Ngugi as for Khan, the continued use of the colonial language in literature, in education, and in intellectual life is not a neutral choice but a political choice that perpetuates colonial power relations by treating the colonizer's language as the natural medium of elevated thought and the

colonized people's languages as adequate only for everyday communication and folklore. The argument is not merely about language in the narrow linguistic sense. It is about what the philosopher Miranda Fricker has called epistemic injustice: the systematic devaluation of certain ways of knowing and certain forms of knowledge on the basis of their association with groups that have been colonially constituted as inferior. To write and teach exclusively in English in postcolonial Bangladesh, in Khan's analysis, is to participate in an epistemic injustice toward the Bengali-speaking population, to constitute them as lacking the intellectual resources for serious thought and therefore dependent on the English-educated elite for their access to important ideas.

The parallel between Ngugi and Khan is not merely thematic. Both thinkers are also engaged in the practical project of creating and sustaining an intellectual culture in their mother tongue: Ngugi by writing fiction and cultural criticism in Gikuyu, Khan by writing philosophy and political analysis in Bengali and by insisting that Bengali should be the medium of education at all levels of the Bangladeshi educational system. Both have faced the practical difficulty that the global knowledge economy systematically disadvantages works produced in non-metropolitan languages: Ngugi's Gikuyu works are far less widely read than his English works, and Khan's Bengali writings have almost no visibility outside the Bengali-speaking world. This shared difficulty is itself a symptom of the global epistemic injustice that both thinkers are attempting to address.

The difference between the two cases is also instructive. Ngugi's decision to write exclusively in Gikuyu was a more radical break with the metropolitan language than anything the Bangladeshi tradition has attempted. Khan writes in both Bengali and English, and the Bangladeshi tradition's engagement with European theoretical frameworks has been, as we have seen, sustained and productive even as it has been critical. This is partly a matter of the different cultural situations: Bengali is a far more developed literary language than Gikuyu, with a richer literary tradition and a larger literate readership, and the stakes of the language choice are somewhat different in each case. But it is also a reflection of the Bangladeshi tradition's consistent position that the goal is not the rejection of European intellectual frameworks but their transformation and adaptation to local conditions: a position that is epistemologically more complex and politically more nuanced than Ngugi's radical break, even if it is also in some ways more difficult to sustain without collapsing into the cultural mimicry it opposes.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR: THE LATIN AMERICAN CRITICAL TRADITION AND ITS PARALLELS WITH BANGLADESHI THOUGHT

Dependency Theory, Liberation Theology, and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed

64.1 Dependency Theory and the Political Economy of Underdevelopment

The Latin American dependency theory tradition, developed primarily in the 1960s and 1970s by economists and social theorists associated with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, represents one of the most significant attempts in global intellectual history to develop an analytical framework adequate to the specific conditions of economic

underdevelopment in the postcolonial world. The tradition's foundational insight, associated with economists like Raul Prebisch, Andre Gunder Frank, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and Enzo Faletto, is that the underdevelopment of the countries of the global South is not a natural condition or a stage in a universal process of development that all societies must pass through, but a specific structural condition produced by the incorporation of peripheral economies into the global capitalist system in a subordinate position that systematically transfers value from the periphery to the center.

This insight is directly relevant to the Bangladeshi tradition's analysis of Bangladesh's economic situation. Abdur Razzaq's political economy, drawing on the Laski tradition and on his own close observation of the economic conditions of Bengal and Bangladesh, was not formally a dependency theory framework, but it contained elements that are structurally similar to the dependency theorists' analysis: his attention to the ways in which the specific structure of Bangladesh's colonial and postcolonial economy has systematically prevented the accumulation of the capital and the development of the institutional capacity necessary for genuine economic development, and his skepticism about the development models promoted by international institutions that treated Bangladesh's poverty as a technical problem to be solved by the right combination of policies rather than as a structural consequence of its specific position in the global economy.

Salimullah Khan's engagement with Marxist political economy is more explicit and more theoretically developed than Razzaq's, and his analysis of Bangladesh's relationship with India, which he has described as a form of continued dependency that has replaced Pakistani domination with Indian economic and political hegemony, has structural parallels with the dependency theorists' analysis of the relationship between core and peripheral economies in the capitalist world system. Khan's argument that India seeks to keep Bangladesh as a kind of colony, made in the specific political context of December 2024, is not merely a nationalist provocation. It is a claim about the structural dynamics of the relationship between a larger, more economically and politically developed neighboring state and a smaller, less powerful one, a claim that connects to the dependency theory tradition's broader analysis of the ways in which powerful states, even those that do not engage in formal colonial rule, can maintain structural power over weaker neighbors through economic, military, and political leverage.

The comparison with the dependency theory tradition also reveals an important gap in the Bangladeshi intellectual tradition's engagement with economic analysis. The dependency theorists, whatever the limitations of their specific theoretical framework, were engaged in a sustained technical analysis of economic structures and economic dynamics that went far beyond the level of political critique. Their work involved detailed empirical analysis of trade patterns, investment flows, technological dependency, and the terms of trade, and generated specific policy proposals for breaking the structural conditions of dependency through import substitution industrialization, regional economic integration, and the reform of the international economic order. The Bangladeshi tradition, with its primary orientation toward political philosophy, cultural criticism, and psychoanalytic analysis, has not produced an equivalent level of technical economic analysis, and this gap in the tradition's coverage is one that subsequent thinkers in the Bangladeshi tradition will need to address if it is to provide an adequate analytical framework for understanding the specific economic conditions of Bangladesh in the twenty-first century.

64.2 Paulo Freire and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) is one of the most widely read works in the global tradition of critical education theory, and its influence has extended far beyond the specific Brazilian context within which it was developed. Freire's central argument, that conventional education is a "banking" system that deposits information in passive student recipients, thereby reproducing the passive relationship to knowledge that sustains political domination, and that genuinely liberatory education must instead involve a dialogical process through which students and teachers learn together by engaging critically with their shared conditions of existence, resonates powerfully with the educational philosophy implicit in the Bangladeshi tradition.

The resonances are most clearly visible in the contrast between Freire's dialogical pedagogy and the specific educational practices that the Bangladeshi tradition has most consistently criticized. Salimullah Khan's critique of the Bangladeshi educational system as reproducing colonial hierarchies rather than challenging them, as treating students as passive recipients of already-determined knowledge rather than as active agents in the production of knowledge about their own conditions, is directly parallel to Freire's analysis of the banking model of education. And the alternative that the tradition implicitly models in its own pedagogical practice, particularly in the Socratic teaching method that was Abdur Razzaq's distinctive contribution to Bangladeshi intellectual culture, is closely related to Freire's dialogical pedagogy: the method of learning through questioning, through dialogue, through the mutual engagement of teacher and student with the real problems of their shared situation.

Freire's specific emphasis on the liberatory potential of education for the oppressed, his argument that the first step toward political liberation is the development of what he calls "conscientization," critical consciousness of one's own conditions of existence, connects to the tradition's broader project of developing in Bangladeshi intellectual and political life the critical awareness that genuine democratic governance requires. The tradition's insistence that Bangladesh's political problems are not merely organizational or technical but are rooted in the absence of a genuine critical culture, a culture in which citizens are capable of analyzing their situation, identifying the structural forces that shape it, and imagining alternatives, is a claim about conscientization in the Freirean sense even if the tradition's vocabulary for making this claim is different.

The comparison with Freire also reveals an important dimension of the tradition's practical political significance. Freire's pedagogy was not merely a theory but a practice: he actually worked with rural communities in Brazil and subsequently in various African and Latin American countries, developing literacy programs that were simultaneously programs of political conscientization. The tradition's engagement with practical educational work has been less developed, partly because the three major figures have been primarily university intellectuals rather than community educators. But the tradition's aspiration to contribute to a broader process of cultural and political transformation in Bangladesh, its understanding of intellectual work as a form of political practice rather than an autonomous academic enterprise, is fundamentally Freirean in its orientation even if the specific forms of engagement with popular education that Freire pioneered have not been central to the tradition's practice.

64.3 Liberation Theology and the Question of Religious Radicalism

Liberation theology, the movement in Latin American Catholicism associated with figures like Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, and Oscar Romero, represents a genuinely distinctive intellectual and spiritual tradition that has no direct equivalent in the Islamic intellectual world but offers illuminating parallels with certain dimensions of the Bangladeshi tradition's engagement with religion and politics. Liberation theology's central claim, that the Christian Gospel requires a "preferential option for the poor," a commitment to the liberation of the poor and oppressed as the primary practical expression of Christian faith, led its adherents to a sustained engagement with Marxist social analysis, with the specific political conditions of Latin American poverty and oppression, and with the relationship between religious faith and political action that produced one of the most creative syntheses of theology and social criticism in the twentieth century.

The structural parallel with the Bangladeshi tradition's engagement with Islam is illuminating. Like the liberation theologians, the Bangladeshi tradition has consistently argued that Islamic faith, properly understood, requires a commitment to social justice, equality, and the liberation of the oppressed, and that the various forms of Islamic political practice that have accommodated social hierarchy, political authoritarianism, and the interests of the powerful represent not a genuine expression of Islamic values but a distortion and betrayal of them. Like the liberation theologians, the tradition has engaged with Marxist social analysis not as a substitute for religious faith but as a tool for understanding the specific social structures that contradict religious values and that must be transformed if those values are to be expressed in social reality.

But the differences are also significant. Liberation theology operated within a specific institutional context, the Catholic Church, with its hierarchical authority structure, its global reach, and its capacity for both institutional support and institutional suppression of radical theological movements. The Bangladeshi tradition's engagement with Islam is not mediated by any equivalent institutional structure: it operates within the diverse and decentralized world of Bangladeshi Islamic practice, without the kind of institutional support or institutional opposition that the Catholic hierarchy provided for liberation theology. This difference in institutional context gives the Bangladeshi tradition's religious engagement a different character: it is less susceptible to the kind of institutional suppression that eventually constrained liberation theology under the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, but it is also without the institutional resources, including the network of base communities, the support of progressive bishops, and the global visibility provided by the Catholic Church's international presence, that allowed liberation theology to sustain itself as a movement and to have a significant impact on both ecclesiastical and political life in Latin America.

64.4 Jose Carlos Mariategui and the Question of Cultural Synthesis

Jose Carlos Mariategui, the Peruvian Marxist thinker who died in 1930, is less well known than the dependency theorists and liberation theologians but arguably offers the most sophisticated parallel with the Bangladeshi tradition's approach to the relationship between Marxist analysis, indigenous cultural traditions, and the specific conditions of a peripheral society attempting to think through its own conditions of existence and possibilities of liberation. Mariategui's central

contribution was his insistence that the application of Marxist analysis to Peruvian conditions required a creative synthesis of Marxist categories with the specific realities of Peruvian social and cultural life, including the specific forms of indigenous communal life that had survived the Spanish conquest and that he saw as containing genuine resources for a socialist transformation that was rooted in Peruvian conditions rather than simply imported from European models.

Mariategui's approach, which he called "heroic creation" in contrast to the mechanical application of ready-made formulas, is closely parallel to the Bangladeshi tradition's insistence on the necessity of developing analytical frameworks that are adequate to specifically Bangladeshi conditions rather than simply applying European theoretical frameworks without modification. The tradition's attempt to synthesize Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marxist political economy, Bengali literary and cultural criticism, Islamic philosophical reflection, and specific historical analysis of the Bangladeshi situation is precisely the kind of "heroic creation" that Mariategui advocated: the creative synthesis of theoretical resources from diverse traditions in the service of understanding and transforming a specific social reality.

The comparison also raises, in an acute form, the question of what the relationship is between theory and political practice in the Bangladeshi tradition. Mariategui was not merely a theorist but an organizer: he was involved in the Peruvian labor movement and in the founding of the Peruvian Socialist Party, and his theoretical work was always developed in close connection with political practice. The Bangladeshi tradition's relationship to political practice has been more complex and more ambivalent: its three major figures have been primarily intellectuals rather than political organizers, and their engagement with political life has been through the medium of intellectual criticism rather than organizational participation. This difference raises important questions about the tradition's capacity to contribute to the specific forms of political transformation it advocates, questions that connect to the broader problem of the relationship between intellectual work and political action in postcolonial societies.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE: THE ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL TRADITION IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Iqbal, Shariati, Bennabi, and the Comparative Dimension of Islamic Modernity

65.1 The Global Dimension of Islamic Intellectual Renewal

The Bangladeshi tradition's engagement with Islamic thought cannot be adequately understood without placing it in the context of the broader global tradition of Islamic intellectual renewal that has been underway since the nineteenth century and that has produced a series of thinkers grappling with fundamentally similar questions about the relationship between Islamic identity and modern political and intellectual life. This tradition, which stretches from the nineteenth-century reformers like Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani through Iqbal and the twentieth-century Islamic modernists to the more recent debates about political Islam that have been generated by the Iranian revolution, the rise of political Islamist movements across the Muslim world, and the specific challenges of navigating the relationship between Islamic

identity and democratic governance in the post-Cold War era, provides an essential comparative context for understanding the Bangladeshi tradition's specific approach to these questions.

The fundamental problem that all thinkers in this tradition have addressed is what might be called the problem of Islamic modernity: the question of how a civilization formed by Islamic religious, legal, and cultural traditions can engage with modernity, understood both as a specific historical period characterized by industrialization, rationalization, and democratization, and as a specific set of intellectual and cultural values associated with the European Enlightenment, without either abandoning its Islamic identity or becoming irrelevant to the conditions of contemporary life. This problem has generated a spectrum of responses ranging from the rejection of modernity in the name of a purified Islamic tradition, the position associated with various strains of Salafi and Wahhabi thought, through various attempts at synthesis that seek to show that Islamic tradition contains within it resources adequate to modernity's challenges, to the more radical positions that argue for a fundamental reinterpretation of Islamic jurisprudence and theology in the light of modern conditions.

The Bangladeshi tradition's position in this spectrum is distinctive and worth articulating carefully. It is not a position of rejection: the tradition has consistently engaged with modern intellectual frameworks, including rationalism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis, as genuine sources of insight rather than as threats to Islamic identity to be resisted. It is not a position of uncritical synthesis either: the tradition has been consistently critical of the specific forms of Islamic modernism that have accommodated colonial power in the name of Islamic renewal, and it has been particularly critical of the ways in which various Islamic political formations have used the language of Islamic authenticity to justify authoritarianism, the suppression of women's rights, and the exclusion of non-Muslim minorities from full political participation. The tradition's position is better described as a critical engagement: a sustained attempt to use both Islamic and non-Islamic intellectual resources in the service of understanding and transforming the specific conditions of Bangladeshi life, conducted with an awareness of the specific history of Islam in Bengal and with a commitment to the values of equality, human dignity, and democratic governance that the tradition has consistently identified as the normative core of both its Islamic inheritance and its modern political commitments.

65.2 Ali Shariati and the Radical Islamic Intellectual Tradition

Ali Shariati, the Iranian sociologist and philosopher whose work was deeply influential in the intellectual ferment that preceded the Iranian revolution of 1979, is perhaps the most interesting comparison with the Bangladeshi tradition from within the Islamic intellectual world. Shariati's project was to develop a revolutionary Islam that could serve as the ideological foundation for a genuinely liberatory political movement: an Islam purged of its accommodations with social hierarchy and political authoritarianism, reinterpreted in the light of existentialist philosophy, Marxist social analysis, and the specific experiences of Iranian and Muslim experience under Western imperialism.

Shariati's engagement with Frantz Fanon, whom he read and translated into Persian, is particularly interesting for our comparative purposes. Like Salimullah Khan, Shariati saw in Fanon's analysis of colonial psychology a framework that could illuminate the specific condition

of Muslim societies under Western imperialism, and like Khan, he attempted to synthesize the Fanonist analysis with Islamic philosophical and theological resources to produce an intellectual framework adequate to the specific conditions of his own society. The parallel between the two projects is not coincidental: both Shariati and Khan are engaged in the same fundamental intellectual task, the construction of an analytical framework that takes both the Islamic and the secular critical traditions seriously as resources for understanding postcolonial conditions, and that refuses the choice between a secular modernism that dismisses Islamic tradition as irrelevant or reactionary and an Islamic traditionalism that dismisses modern critical thought as alien and corrupting.

But the comparison also reveals important differences. Shariati's intellectual project was developed in the specific context of the Iranian revolution, a context of intense political urgency and ideological ferment in which the pressure to produce a clear and mobilizing ideological framework was overwhelming. This pressure shaped the character of his thought in ways that sometimes led to oversimplification and to a prophetic register that sacrificed analytical rigor for emotional and political impact. The Bangladeshi tradition, developed in a context where the pressure has been more often toward intellectual conformism and political accommodation than toward revolutionary mobilization, has generally maintained a higher level of analytical complexity and a greater willingness to acknowledge contradictions and ambiguities that Shariati's more openly revolutionary framework sometimes obscured.

The subsequent history of the Iranian revolution also provides a cautionary tale that is not without relevance for the Bangladeshi tradition. The Islamic revolutionary movement that Shariati's thought helped to inspire rapidly developed, after his death in 1977, in directions that he would almost certainly have opposed: toward a form of theocratic authoritarianism that suppressed the very freedoms, including the freedom of women and the freedom of political dissent, that Shariati's revolutionary Islam had championed. This trajectory raises important questions about the relationship between Islamic intellectual radicalism and democratic political practice that the Bangladeshi tradition has engaged with, particularly in its sustained critical analysis of the political formations that claim Islamic identity in Bangladesh, but that it has not yet fully resolved.

65.3 Malek Bennabi and the Problem of Colonizability

Malek Bennabi, the Algerian thinker who developed across a series of works from the 1940s through the 1970s a theory of what he called "colonizability," the conditions within Islamic civilization that made it susceptible to colonial conquest and domination, is less well known in the Anglophone world than Fanon or Shariati but offers a comparison with the Bangladeshi tradition that is in some ways more instructive than either.

Bennabi's central argument is that colonialism is not merely an external force imposed on Islamic societies from without but also the symptom of an internal crisis within Islamic civilization: a crisis of ideas, of social organization, and of spiritual vitality that had been developing for centuries before the European colonial conquest and that made Islamic societies susceptible to domination by a colonial power that was, by certain objective measures, less culturally rich but more dynamically organized and more intellectually vigorous. The colonial

encounter, in Bennabi's analysis, is the external manifestation of an internal problem, and genuine decolonization therefore requires not merely the expulsion of the colonizer but a profound internal reform of the colonized society's intellectual, cultural, and spiritual life.

This analysis has direct parallels with the Bangladeshi tradition's critique of Bangladeshi intellectual and political culture. Ahmed Sofa's argument that Bangladeshi intellectuals are servile and opportunistic, that they lack the courage to speak truth to power and the intellectual independence to develop genuine knowledge of their own conditions, is a version of Bennabi's argument about the internal conditions that make colonization possible. The tradition's insistence that genuine liberation requires not merely political independence but a profound transformation of the intellectual and cultural life of the society, a transformation that involves the development of genuine critical consciousness and the rejection of the various forms of colonial mimicry and intellectual dependency that persist after formal independence, parallels Bennabi's analysis of the conditions of genuine decolonization with considerable fidelity.

The comparison with Bennabi also raises, however, a dimension of the analysis that the Bangladeshi tradition has not always engaged with as directly as it might: the question of what within the tradition itself, within the Bengali Muslim intellectual and cultural tradition, has been the source of the susceptibility to domination that the tradition's critique identifies. Bennabi's analysis of colonizability requires him to engage critically with the internal conditions of Islamic civilization, to identify the specific features of Islamic thought and social organization that had weakened the Islamic world's capacity for self-defense and self-renewal. The Bangladeshi tradition's critique is primarily directed outward, at the colonial power and its postcolonial successors, and while it certainly includes a critique of Bangladeshi intellectual elites and their accommodations with power, it has not always engaged with the same depth and specificity with the question of what within the Bengali Muslim cultural tradition itself has contributed to the patterns of political failure and intellectual servility that the tradition identifies and criticizes.

65.4 Contemporary Political Islam and the Tradition's Critical Framework

The rise of political Islam in its various contemporary forms, from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to Hamas in Palestine, from the Justice and Development Party in Turkey to the various Islamist formations in Bangladesh, represents the specific political challenge that the Bangladeshi tradition's framework for understanding the relationship between Islamic identity and democratic politics is most urgently required to address in the 2020s. The political landscape of Bangladesh in 2026, as we have seen in earlier chapters, is one in which Islamist formations have gained new political visibility and legitimacy following the delegitimation of the Hasina government's secular nationalism by its authoritarian record.

The tradition's approach to contemporary political Islam, as articulated most clearly in Salimullah Khan's recent analyses, maintains the position that has been characteristic of the tradition throughout its development: a position that refuses both the secularist dismissal of Islamic political claims as inherently antidemocratic and the uncritical celebration of Islamic political formations as authentic expressions of popular religious identity. The tradition's evaluation of specific Islamic political formations is based not on their religious identity but on their specific political commitments: their relationship to democratic norms and processes, their

approach to minorities, their positions on women's rights, and their relationship to the founding values of the liberation struggle.

This framework for evaluating political Islam is more analytically sophisticated than either the secularist or the Islamist approaches that dominate much of the current debate, and it represents a genuine contribution to the global intellectual effort to think through the relationship between Islamic identity and democratic governance in the specific conditions of postcolonial Muslim societies. Its limitation, as the comparison with the global Islamic intellectual tradition reveals, is that it remains primarily a critical framework: it is better at identifying what is wrong with specific political formations than at articulating a positive vision of what a genuinely Islamic and genuinely democratic political life would look like in Bangladesh. The tradition's positive vision is implicit in its values, its commitments to equality, human dignity, social justice, and democratic governance, but it has not been elaborated in the form of a developed Islamic political philosophy that could serve as the intellectual foundation for a political movement. This is a significant gap, and one that the comparison with the global Islamic intellectual tradition, including the work of figures like Khaled Abou El Fadl on Islamic democracy and Tariq Ramadan on Islamic political ethics, suggests needs to be filled.

CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX: EUROPEAN CRITICAL THEORY AND THE BANGLADESHI INTELLECTUAL PROJECT

Frankfurt School, Gramsci, Althusser, and the Theoretical Resources of the Tradition

66.1 The Frankfurt School and the Critique of Instrumental Reason

The Frankfurt School, the tradition of critical theory associated with the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt and with thinkers including Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, and, in later generations, Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, has been one of the most influential intellectual traditions in twentieth-century thought. Its central contribution, developed across a vast range of philosophical, sociological, aesthetic, and cultural-critical writings, is its sustained critique of what Horkheimer and Adorno called "instrumental reason," the form of rationality that reduces all thought and all reality to the calculation of means to pre-given ends, that treats everything, including human beings, as material to be processed and used, and that has become, in their analysis, the dominant form of reason in advanced capitalist societies.

The Frankfurt School's critique of instrumental reason has obvious relevance to the tradition we are examining. The tradition's critique of Bangladeshi political culture, with its emphasis on the ways in which politics has been reduced to the manipulation of symbols and identities in the service of elite interests rather than the genuine expression of popular will, its critique of the educational system's reduction of knowledge to credentialing rather than genuine understanding, and its broader critique of the ways in which economic development has been pursued as an end in itself rather than as a means to human flourishing, all have structural parallels with the

Frankfurt School's diagnosis of the pathologies of instrumental reason in advanced capitalist societies.

Walter Benjamin is the Frankfurt School thinker whose work is most directly relevant to the Bangladeshi tradition's concerns. Benjamin's reflections on the relationship between language, experience, and political possibility, his analysis of the ways in which the commodification of culture under capitalism destroys the forms of collective memory and shared experience that genuine political community requires, his insistence on the importance of recovering the "tradition of the oppressed" from beneath the triumphalist narratives of the powerful, and his messianic dimension, his conviction that the genuine revolutionary act is the interruption of the continuous flow of historical catastrophe by the explosive irruption of suppressed possibility, all connect to dimensions of the Bangladeshi tradition's intellectual project. Salimullah Khan has written on Benjamin, and the Benjaminian influence is visible in certain dimensions of Khan's approach to cultural criticism, particularly in his attention to the ways in which official historical narratives suppress the experiences and the agency of the oppressed, and in his insistence on the importance of recovering those suppressed dimensions of historical experience as a condition of genuine political transformation.

Jurgen Habermas, the Frankfurt School's second-generation theorist, offers a more direct parallel with the tradition's normative commitments. Habermas's theory of communicative rationality, his argument that human reason in its most fundamental form is not the instrumental reason that reduces everything to means and ends but the communicative reason that is expressed in genuine dialogue oriented toward mutual understanding, and his theory of discourse ethics, which grounds normative political principles in the conditions of ideal rational communication, has structural similarities to the tradition's own understanding of genuine democratic politics as a form of rational communication in which all citizens have equal standing and the best argument, rather than the most powerful interest, should prevail.

The comparison with Habermas also reveals, however, an important tension between the tradition's commitments and the Habermasian framework. Habermas's theory of communicative rationality is developed within the tradition of Kantian universalism, the tradition that grounds moral and political norms in the requirements of reason considered from a universal perspective. The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is also in certain respects committed to universalist values, particularly the values of human dignity and democratic governance. But the tradition's universalism is inflected by its specific historical experience of the ways in which claims to universalism have been used to justify colonialism and postcolonial domination, and it therefore maintains a much more acute awareness than Habermas of the ways in which allegedly universal norms can serve particular interests and particular power structures. This awareness produces a tradition that is simultaneously committed to universal values and deeply skeptical of any specific instantiation of those values in institutional forms, a combination that is philosophically more complex than Habermas's relatively optimistic discourse ethics but also potentially more adequate to the actual conditions of postcolonial political life.

66.2 Antonio Gramsci and the Theory of Cultural Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist theorist who developed, in the Prison Notebooks written between 1929 and 1935 during his imprisonment by Mussolini's fascist government, one of the most sophisticated accounts of the relationship between culture, power, and political change in the Marxist tradition, is an intellectual presence that can be felt, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, throughout the work of the Bangladeshi tradition. Gramsci's central theoretical contribution is his analysis of "hegemony," the concept he uses to describe the way in which dominant social groups maintain their power not merely through the coercive apparatus of the state but also through the production and maintenance of a cultural and ideological framework that makes the existing social order appear natural, inevitable, and legitimate to those it most fundamentally disadvantages.

The resonances between Gramscian hegemony theory and the Bangladeshi tradition's analysis of cultural and intellectual life are pervasive. The tradition's critique of Bangladeshi intellectual servility, its analysis of the ways in which the educated elite reproduces colonial hierarchies while claiming to represent national interests, its insistence on the need for a counter-hegemonic intellectual culture capable of articulating an alternative vision of social and political life, all fall within the broad framework of Gramscian cultural politics. Ahmed Sofa's call for Bangladeshi intellectuals to be genuine rather than servile is, in Gramscian terms, a call for the development of organic intellectuals, intellectuals who are genuinely connected to and representative of the interests and perspectives of the popular classes rather than being merely credentialed functionaries of the ruling class dressed in the language of national service.

Gramsci's concept of the "war of position," his argument that in advanced societies the struggle for political transformation must proceed primarily through a prolonged struggle for cultural and ideological hegemony rather than through the kind of frontal assault on state power that the Bolshevik revolution had represented, is also directly relevant to the tradition's understanding of its own political function. The tradition's sustained investment in intellectual and cultural work, its refusal of the immediate satisfactions of partisan political engagement in favor of the longer-term project of developing a critical culture adequate to genuine democratic governance, reflects a Gramscian understanding of the conditions of political transformation even if it is not always explicitly framed in Gramscian terms.

The comparison with Gramsci also reveals a dimension of the tradition's work that has not always been fully articulated within the tradition itself: its role as a form of counter-hegemonic intellectual practice. The tradition's consistent challenge to the dominant narratives of Bangladeshi political life, its critique of both secular nationalism and Islamist politics, its insistence on recovering the suppressed histories and perspectives of those who have been marginalized by the dominant political formations, and its development of analytical frameworks that make visible the structural conditions that sustain existing patterns of power, all constitute a counter-hegemonic intellectual practice in the Gramscian sense. Making this dimension of the tradition's work explicit, articulating it in the language of hegemony theory, would allow the tradition to connect more directly with the global Gramscian intellectual tradition and to benefit from the conceptual resources that tradition has developed for understanding the relationship between intellectual work, cultural politics, and political transformation.

66.3 Louis Althusser and the Theory of Ideological State Apparatuses

Louis Althusser's structural Marxism, with its central concepts of ideology, ideological state apparatuses, and interpellation, offers a framework that has had a significant, if sometimes unacknowledged, influence on the Bangladeshi tradition's analysis of the relationship between educational institutions, cultural practices, and the reproduction of social relations. Althusser's argument that the reproduction of capitalist social relations depends not only on the economic structure and the repressive state apparatus but also on a set of "ideological state apparatuses," including the school, the family, the church, and the media, that interpellate individuals as subjects of the existing social order by constituting them as particular kinds of social beings with particular identities, desires, and understandings of their situation, has direct relevance to the tradition's analysis of the Bangladeshi educational system and its role in reproducing colonial hierarchies.

Salimullah Khan's critique of the Bangladeshi educational system can be read as an Althusserian analysis of the school as an ideological state apparatus: the argument that the system's preference for English over Bengali, its reproduction of colonial hierarchical structures, and its production of graduates who are equipped to serve in the existing social order but not to critically analyze or transform it, is precisely an argument about how the educational institution functions as an ideological apparatus that reproduces existing power relations by constituting students as particular kinds of subjects with particular understandings of what knowledge is, what intelligence means, and what social positions are available to them.

The comparison with Althusser also raises, however, some of the most significant theoretical tensions within the tradition. Althusserian structural Marxism has been criticized, not without justice, for its tendency toward a form of structural determinism that leaves little room for genuine human agency: if individuals are always already constituted as subjects by the ideological state apparatuses, the question of how genuine political change is possible becomes very difficult to answer. The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is not a tradition that shares this determinism. Its central commitment is to the possibility of genuine human agency, to the capacity of people to understand their conditions critically and to act to transform them, and this commitment is what gives the tradition's critical work its political significance. The tension between the Althusserian analysis of ideological determination and the tradition's commitment to human agency is a productive tension that the tradition has not always resolved but has navigated with considerable theoretical sophistication, particularly in Khan's use of Lacanian psychoanalysis to theorize the subject as simultaneously constituted by symbolic structures and capable of genuine ethical and political agency.

66.4 Lacan, Psychoanalysis, and the Bangladeshi Unconscious

Salimullah Khan's engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis is one of the most distinctive features of the Bangladeshi tradition's theoretical framework, and it represents both one of its most original contributions to global intellectual discourse and one of its most controversial dimensions. Lacan's reinterpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis in terms derived from structural linguistics, his analysis of the subject as constituted through its relationship to language and the symbolic order, his theory of desire as always mediated by the Other, and his concept of the Real as the dimension of experience that resists symbolization, provide Khan with a set of analytical

tools that he has used with considerable originality to analyze the specific dynamics of Bangladeshi political and cultural life.

The most productive application of Lacanian concepts in the tradition's work is Khan's use of the concept of the "pervert" to describe the Bangladeshi ruling class: a class that, in his analysis, knows perfectly well that Bengali is the nation's language but chooses English in its professional and institutional life, thereby acting in a way that systematically contradicts its own stated commitments and values. The Lacanian concept of perversion, in which the pervert disavows the symbolic law while simultaneously enacting it in a distorted form, provides a more analytically precise description of this phenomenon than would be available within a framework that relies solely on the concepts of hypocrisy or self-interest. The pervert does not simply not know or not care about the symbolic law. The pervert knows it, acknowledges it in words, and then systematically acts against it, deriving from this gap between word and act a specific form of enjoyment that sustains the structure of disavowal. Applied to the Bangladeshi ruling class's relationship to Bengali language and culture, this framework suggests that the persistence of the English preference is not simply a matter of convenience or social advantage but reflects a deeper structural feature of the ruling class's relationship to its own identity, a feature that cannot be addressed by simply pointing out the contradiction between words and actions but requires a more fundamental transformation of the social and psychological structures that sustain the disavowal.

The comparison with the global Lacanian intellectual tradition, including figures like Slavoj Žižek, who has applied Lacanian frameworks to the analysis of contemporary ideology and politics with enormous success and influence, reveals both the sophistication of Khan's theoretical engagement and the specific dimensions of his adaptation of Lacanian concepts to the Bangladeshi context. Khan's Lacan is not identical to Žižek's Lacan: where Žižek tends to use Lacanian concepts to analyze the general dynamics of contemporary ideology, often in a manner that abstracts from specific historical and cultural conditions, Khan's use of Lacanian concepts is always grounded in the specific conditions of Bangladeshi political and cultural life, and always oriented toward the specific political project of understanding and contributing to the transformation of those conditions. This rootedness in the specific is one of the Bangladeshi tradition's most consistent and most valuable characteristics, and it gives the tradition's theoretical work a grounded quality that the more abstract theoretical work of metropolitan intellectuals sometimes lacks.

CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN: THE GLOBAL LEFT AND THE BANGLADESHI TRADITION

Socialism, Marxism, and the Specific Forms of Left Politics in Bangladesh

67.1 The Bangladeshi Left in Historical Perspective

The Bangladeshi left, in its various organizational and intellectual forms, has been both a context for and a subject of the tradition's intellectual work. Understanding the tradition's relationship to

left politics requires a brief account of the specific history of left political organization in Bangladesh and in Bengal more broadly, and of the specific ways in which the tradition's three major figures have engaged with, contributed to, and diverged from the various strands of left political thought and practice.

The left political tradition in Bengal has deep roots that extend back to the 1920s and 1930s, when the Communist Party of India established a significant presence in the province and when the broader tradition of socialist and progressive thought that had developed in Bengal through the influence of the Bengal Renaissance began to take on specifically Marxist forms. The All India Progressive Writers' Association, founded in 1936, was a major site of intellectual ferment in which Bengali writers and intellectuals, both Hindu and Muslim, engaged with Marxist ideas and with the relationship between literary and political commitment in ways that shaped the intellectual environment within which subsequent generations of Bengali thinkers, including all three of the figures at the center of this textbook, were formed.

The post-1947 history of the Bangladeshi left is characterized by a succession of organizational splits, ideological debates, and political realignments that make it one of the more complex chapters in the history of global left politics. The specific dynamics of the left in East Pakistan and subsequently in Bangladesh, including the tension between the Moscow line and the Peking line during the Sino-Soviet split, the relationship between left politics and Bengali nationalism during the period leading up to the Liberation War, and the subsequent fragmentation of the left following independence, have produced a situation in which the intellectual tradition we are examining has had to navigate a complex and often contentious political landscape without identifying itself exclusively with any of the specific organizational formations that have claimed the left political tradition.

67.2 Abdur Razzaq, Laski, and Democratic Socialism

Abdur Razzaq's political orientation, as we have traced in earlier chapters, was shaped primarily by his engagement with Harold Laski's democratic socialism. Laski's specific form of socialism, which emphasized the importance of democratic institutions, the rights of trade unions and workers' organizations, the need for economic planning and redistribution, and the dangers of both Stalinist authoritarianism and laissez-faire capitalism, provided Razzaq with a framework for thinking about political and economic development that was neither the orthodox Marxism of the Communist Party nor the liberal nationalism of the mainstream Bengali political movements.

In the context of the global left, Razzaq's Laskian democratic socialism represents a specific tradition within the broader family of left political thought: the tradition of social democracy that sought to combine commitment to economic equality and working-class interests with commitment to democratic institutions and civil liberties. This tradition, which had significant influence in Western Europe through parties like the British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats, faced very different conditions in the postcolonial South, where the specific legacy of colonialism, the weakness of labor movements, the dominance of agrarian social structures, and the absence of the institutional and cultural conditions that had made social democracy viable in Western Europe made the direct application of social democratic frameworks problematic.

Razzaq's response to this difficulty was not to abandon the social democratic framework but to engage seriously with the specific conditions of Bengal and Bangladesh and to think through what a genuinely democratic and egalitarian politics would look like in those conditions. His attention to the sociology of Bengali Muslim society, his analysis of the ways in which colonial rule had disrupted the social structures and economic institutions that might have served as the basis for a democratic politics, and his skepticism about the capacity of the political parties that claimed to represent popular interests to actually deliver on their promises, all reflect an attempt to think concretely about the conditions of democratic socialism in a specific postcolonial context that was different from the conditions under which Laski had developed his framework.

67.3 Ahmed Sofa and the Marxist Cultural Tradition

Ahmed Sofa's relationship with Marxism was complex and characteristic. He was certainly influenced by Marxist thought, particularly in his analysis of the relationship between economic interests and intellectual positions, his critique of the ways in which the educated elite's economic interests shaped its intellectual and political commitments, and his attention to the class dimensions of cultural life and literary production. But he was never a party Marxist, never affiliated with any of the organizational formations of the Bangladeshi left, and his engagement with Marxist thought was always inflected by his broader intellectual independence and his resistance to ideological conformity of any kind.

Sofa's specific contribution to the Bangladeshi tradition's engagement with the left is his analysis of the intellectual as a potentially revolutionary figure who has betrayed that potential by becoming a servant of power. This analysis, which draws on the Gramscian tradition's concern with the role of intellectuals in social transformation without fully acknowledging that debt, represents a form of cultural Marxism that is focused not on the economic base but on the superstructure of intellectual and cultural life. Sofa's argument is that the transformation of Bangladeshi political life requires first a transformation of its intellectual culture, a development of genuinely critical and independent thought that can serve as the ideological foundation for a genuinely democratic and egalitarian politics. This is a cultural Marxist argument, but it is one that is rooted in Sofa's specific observation of the conditions of Bangladeshi intellectual life rather than in any abstract theoretical framework imported from elsewhere.

67.4 The New Left, Post-Marxism, and the Bangladeshi Tradition's Positioning

The emergence of the New Left in the 1960s and its subsequent development through various strands of post-Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, and ecological thought has produced a complex and diverse intellectual landscape within which the Bangladeshi tradition must be positioned. The New Left's critique of orthodox Marxism, its insistence on the importance of cultural politics, identity politics, and the politics of recognition alongside the politics of economic redistribution, and its engagement with the specific concerns of women, racial and ethnic minorities, and colonized peoples as agents of political transformation rather than merely as objects of economic analysis, all connect to dimensions of the Bangladeshi tradition's intellectual work.

At the same time, the Bangladeshi tradition has maintained a critical distance from certain dimensions of the post-Marxist and postmodern left that it sees as leading to political paralysis rather than political transformation. Salimullah Khan's consistent commitment to the importance of class analysis and political economy alongside cultural and psychoanalytic analysis, his refusal to reduce the politics of decolonization to the politics of cultural recognition, and his insistence on the continued relevance of the Marxist framework for understanding the structural dimensions of Bangladeshi and global social inequality, reflect a position within the global left that is more sympathetic to the structural Marxist tradition than to the post-Marxist cultural turn, while incorporating elements of the cultural and psychoanalytic traditions that the structural Marxist tradition has often neglected.

This positioning within the global left reflects the specific conditions of Bangladeshi intellectual life, where the most urgent problems are not the recognition politics of minority groups within advanced capitalist democracies but the structural conditions of underdevelopment, political authoritarianism, and cultural colonialism that the Bangladeshi tradition has consistently analyzed. In these conditions, the tradition's combination of structural Marxist political economy, Lacanian psychoanalytic cultural analysis, and historical materialist attention to the specific conditions of Bangladeshi social development represents a more adequate analytical framework than the more exclusively cultural or identity-focused approaches that have dominated certain strands of the global left in the post-Cold War period.

CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT: POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND THE BANGLADESHI TRADITION

Said, Spivak, Bhabha, and the Academic Postcolonial Project

68.1 Edward Said and the Analysis of Colonial Discourse

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is one of the foundational texts of postcolonial theory, and its influence on the Bangladeshi tradition, while not always explicitly acknowledged, is significant. Said's argument, drawing on Foucault's analysis of discourse and power, is that the Western academic and literary representation of the "Orient" is not a neutral scholarly enterprise but a form of cultural power that has functioned to justify colonial domination by constructing the Orient as the Other of Western civilization: as irrational, despotic, sensual, static, and fundamentally incapable of self-governance without Western tutelage.

The resonances between Said's analysis of *Orientalism* and the Bangladeshi tradition's critique of colonial knowledge production are immediate and clear. The tradition's insistence that Western academic representations of Bangladesh and Bengali Muslim culture cannot be taken as objective scholarship but must be analyzed as forms of cultural power that serve specific political and economic interests is a Saidian position even when it is not framed in explicitly Saidian terms. Salimullah Khan's critique of the ways in which Western-trained scholars have constructed Bangladesh as a "basket case" or a "test case" for development theory, treating Bangladeshi people as objects of analysis rather than as agents of their own history, is directly

parallel to Said's critique of Orientalism's construction of the Arab world as the object of Western knowledge and Western power.

Salimullah Khan has also written explicitly on Said's work, and has engaged with the theoretical framework of Orientalism in his broader analysis of the relationship between Western intellectual production and colonial and postcolonial power. Khan's engagement with Said is characteristically critical as well as appreciative: while he recognizes the importance of Said's analysis of colonial discourse, he has also noted the limitations of Said's framework, including its tendency to treat the Orient as a passive object of Western representation rather than as an active agent that has responded to, resisted, and transformed the colonial encounter in ways that cannot be adequately captured by a framework focused exclusively on the colonizer's discourse.

68.2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and the Subaltern's Voice

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous question, "Can the subaltern speak?", posed in her 1988 essay of the same name, has become one of the most debated questions in postcolonial theory. Spivak's argument, developed through a critical reading of the Subaltern Studies collective and a Derridean analysis of the conditions of representation, is that the subaltern, understood as those who are entirely outside the colonial and postcolonial systems of representation and self-representation, cannot speak in a way that will be heard within those systems, because the very conditions of legibility within those systems are defined by the exclusion of the subaltern's perspective.

The Bangladeshi tradition's engagement with this question is implicit rather than explicit, but it is no less significant for that. The tradition's persistent concern with the relationship between the intellectual and the people, its critique of the intellectual class's failure to genuinely represent popular interests and popular perspectives, and its attempt to develop analytical frameworks that can recover and articulate the experiences and the agency of those who have been most systematically marginalized by both colonial and postcolonial power, all engage with the fundamental problematic that Spivak's question identifies, even if the tradition's approach to this problematic is quite different from Spivak's.

The difference is significant. Spivak's analysis leads, in its most rigorous form, toward a position of radical epistemic humility: the recognition that the postcolonial intellectual cannot speak for the subaltern without simultaneously silencing the subaltern by substituting the intellectual's representation for the subaltern's self-expression. The Bangladeshi tradition, by contrast, maintains that the intellectual has a responsibility to speak, to analyze, to critique, and to articulate alternative visions, even in the awareness that no intellectual can fully represent the perspectives of those who have been most deeply excluded from the systems of representation. The tradition's political commitment requires it to reject the paralysis that can follow from the rigorous application of Spivak's analysis, and to insist that the work of intellectual critique and political advocacy is worthwhile even when it cannot be perfect.

This difference reflects a broader disagreement between the Bangladeshi tradition and the more academically oriented strand of postcolonial theory: a disagreement about the relationship between theoretical rigor and political commitment, and about the conditions under which

intellectual work can be genuinely helpful to the political project of liberation rather than merely producing sophisticated analyses of why liberation is impossible.

68.3 Homi Bhabha, Hybridity, and the Specific Bengali Cultural Condition

Homi Bhabha's theoretical framework, developed across a series of essays collected in *The Location of Culture* (1994), focuses on the concept of "hybridity" as the central characteristic of colonial and postcolonial cultural experience. For Bhabha, the colonial encounter does not produce a simple opposition between colonizer and colonized, dominant culture and subordinate culture. It produces instead a "third space" of cultural hybridity in which the boundaries between self and Other, between dominant and subordinate, are constantly being negotiated, disturbed, and renegotiated in ways that undermine the stability of colonial authority even as they complicate the possibility of a simple return to a pre-colonial cultural identity.

The concept of hybridity has obvious relevance to the specific cultural conditions of Bengali Muslim identity, which has, as we have seen throughout this textbook, been formed at the intersection of multiple cultural traditions, including indigenous Bengali traditions, Islamic traditions from Arabic and Persian sources, Sufi spiritual traditions, the specific cultural forms that developed during the Mughal period, and the colonial encounter with British culture and the European intellectual tradition. Bengali Muslim identity is, in the most profound sense, a hybrid identity, and the tradition's engagement with this hybridity has been one of its central intellectual concerns.

But the tradition's engagement with cultural hybridity is significantly different from Bhabha's. Bhabha's framework, developed primarily through the analysis of canonical literary texts and colonial administrative documents, tends to treat hybridity as a condition of creative ambivalence and subversive mimicry, a site of productive instability that challenges colonial authority. The Bangladeshi tradition's engagement with Bengali Muslim hybridity is more politically grounded and less aesthetically oriented: it treats the hybrid character of Bengali Muslim culture not primarily as a site of subversive play but as a set of cultural resources to be cultivated, defended, and developed in the service of a specific political project of genuine liberation.

The specific controversy over the Bangladeshi tradition's approach to the Arab and Persian elements of Bengali Muslim cultural life, for example, is not a controversy about the subversive potential of cultural mimicry in the Bhabhaian sense. It is a controversy about which cultural traditions belong to the Bengali Muslim heritage and which are external impositions, about what the authentic Bengali Muslim cultural inheritance is and how it should be related to the various external cultural influences that have shaped it. This is a different kind of question from the one that Bhabha's framework addresses, and the tradition's engagement with it reflects a different set of intellectual priorities: not the celebration of ambivalence and instability as politically valuable in themselves, but the serious attempt to understand the specific character of Bengali Muslim culture and to develop from within that culture the intellectual and political resources for genuine liberation.

68.4 The Academic Postcolonial Project and Its Limitations

The comparison with the academic postcolonial theory tradition, the tradition associated with Said, Spivak, and Bhabha and with the academic field of postcolonial studies that has developed in Anglophone universities since the late 1970s, reveals both the affinities between this tradition and the Bangladeshi intellectual project and the significant ways in which the Bangladeshi tradition differs from its academic counterpart.

The most important difference is institutional. The academic postcolonial tradition has been developed primarily within metropolitan university settings, particularly in the United States and Britain, and has been shaped by the specific intellectual and political pressures of those settings: the pressure to produce work that meets the standards of academic scholarship in the disciplines of literary criticism, cultural studies, and social theory, the pressure to engage with the theoretical frameworks that have become dominant within those disciplines, and the pressure to speak to audiences whose primary engagement with the postcolonial world is through texts and representations rather than through direct political engagement.

The Bangladeshi tradition has been developed within a very different institutional and political context: within the specific conditions of Bangladeshi intellectual and political life, in a society where the postcolonial condition is not a theoretical problem but a lived reality, where the failures of postcolonial governance are experienced daily by the great majority of the population, and where the intellectual's responsibility to speak to those failures is experienced as an urgent political obligation rather than a theoretical position. This difference in institutional context has produced a tradition that is less theoretically refined in certain respects than the academic postcolonial tradition, but more politically grounded, more directly engaged with the specific conditions of a specific postcolonial society, and more oriented toward the practical political project of contributing to genuine transformation.

The relationship between the Bangladeshi tradition and the academic postcolonial tradition is therefore not one of simple opposition or simply of complementarity. It is a relationship of productive tension: the Bangladeshi tradition can benefit from the theoretical resources and the analytical precision that the academic tradition has developed, while the academic tradition can benefit from the political groundedness, the historical specificity, and the urgent political commitment that the Bangladeshi tradition exemplifies. The comparative analysis of Part Seven suggests that this productive tension has not yet been adequately developed: the Bangladeshi tradition has engaged with the academic postcolonial tradition primarily through the medium of Khan's translations and theoretical writings, but a fuller and more sustained dialogue between the two traditions, one that would involve not merely the borrowing of theoretical frameworks but the genuine mutual interrogation of each tradition by the other, remains to be developed.

CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE: FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY AND THE TRADITION'S ENGAGEMENT WITH GENDER

The Limits of an Androcentric Intellectual Project and the Resources for Its Transformation

69.1 The Silence on Gender in the Tradition's Foundational Texts

One of the most significant and most revealing limitations of the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, when viewed from the comparative perspective of global feminist philosophy, is its relative silence on the question of gender and the specific forms of oppression and exclusion that have structured the lives of Bangladeshi women. This silence is not absolute: the tradition has engaged with the situation of women in certain specific contexts, particularly in the analysis of female education, women's rights in Islamic law, and the specific political contributions of figures like Roquia Sakhawat Hussain, whom Salimullah Khan has written about with evident admiration. But the tradition's engagement with gender as a fundamental dimension of the social structure it analyzes, and with feminist philosophy as a theoretical tradition that challenges and enriches the analytical frameworks it employs, has been significantly less developed than its engagement with other dimensions of its intellectual project.

This relative neglect of gender as a fundamental analytical category is itself a significant intellectual finding. It suggests that the tradition, despite its commitment to the equal dignity of all human beings and its critique of all forms of social hierarchy and discrimination, has not fully worked through the implications of that commitment for the specific forms of hierarchy and discrimination that structure the lives of women in Bangladesh. The tradition's critique of colonial power, of dynastic politics, of intellectual servility, and of the oppression of the poor and the marginalized, has been conducted primarily from a perspective that takes male experience as its default and treats gender as a secondary or derivative dimension of social life rather than as a fundamental axis of social organization in its own right.

69.2 Roquia Sakhawat Hussain and the Bengali Feminist Tradition

The comparison with the global feminist philosophical tradition must begin, for the Bangladeshi context, with the foundational figure of Bengali feminist thought: Roquia Sakhawat Hussain, the writer and activist whose *Sultana's Dream* (1905) is one of the earliest works of feminist utopian fiction in world literature, and whose practical work in founding schools for Muslim girls in colonial Bengal represents one of the most significant educational interventions in the history of Bangladeshi women's history.

Roquia's significance for the tradition we are examining is complex. She is recognized within the tradition as a figure of importance: Salimullah Khan has written about her work, and the tradition's broader commitment to the decolonization of Bangladeshi intellectual and cultural life would seem to require engagement with one of the most significant Bengali intellectual figures of the early twentieth century. But the engagement has been limited, and the specific dimensions of Roquia's critique, her analysis of how purdah and gender seclusion have limited women's intellectual and social development, her insistence on the importance of women's education as a condition of genuine social progress, and her vision of a society in which women exercise equal intellectual and social agency, have not been fully integrated into the tradition's broader analytical framework.

This gap is significant because Roquia's critique is not merely a feminist critique in a narrow sense. It is a critique of the specific forms of social hierarchy and intellectual exclusion that the

tradition itself has consistently identified and challenged. The seclusion of women from intellectual and public life is a form of the intellectual servility and dependence that the tradition has analyzed and criticized in the domain of colonial education: it is the production of subjects who are constituted as incapable of genuine intellectual agency by the social structures within which they are embedded. To engage fully with Roquia's critique would be to extend the tradition's own analytical framework into a domain where it has been inadequately developed, and to recognize that the tradition's commitment to genuine intellectual independence and genuine democratic participation requires a specific engagement with the conditions of women's intellectual and political agency.

69.3 Global Feminist Philosophy and the Challenge to Androcentric Analysis

The global feminist philosophical tradition, represented by thinkers as diverse as Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, bell hooks, Judith Butler, Seyla Benhabib, Uma Narayan, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, has developed a rich body of theoretical work that challenges the androcentrism of mainstream philosophical and political traditions and insists on the importance of gender as a fundamental analytical category. The specific contributions of this tradition that are most relevant to the Bangladeshi context are those that address the relationship between feminist politics and other forms of political struggle: the work of postcolonial feminist thinkers like Uma Narayan and Chandra Talpade Mohanty on the relationship between feminist theory developed in the global North and the specific conditions of women in the global South.

Uma Narayan's *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism* (1997) raises directly the question that is most relevant to the Bangladeshi tradition's limitations in the domain of gender: the question of what it means to engage with feminist politics from within a postcolonial context in which the specific cultural practices that affect women's lives are simultaneously targets of Western feminist critique and objects of nationalist cultural defense. Narayan's analysis of how colonial power has used the condition of women in the colonial society to justify colonialism, constructing indigenous cultural practices as barbaric and requiring Western civilizing intervention, and how anticolonial nationalism has responded by defending those same cultural practices as authentic national traditions that must be preserved against colonial attack, captures a dynamic that is directly relevant to the Bangladeshi context.

In Bangladesh, as in many postcolonial societies, the relationship between feminist politics and anticolonial politics has been fraught with this specific tension. The tradition's anticolonial commitment, its defense of Bengali Muslim cultural practices against Western and Indian critics who use their alleged backwardness to justify continued external intervention, has sometimes led it toward positions that protect specific cultural practices affecting women's lives from feminist critique in the name of cultural authenticity. The tradition's framework does not require this accommodation, since its commitment to equality and human dignity is explicitly universal, but the specific cultural and political pressures of the Bangladeshi context have sometimes made it difficult for the tradition to maintain both its anticolonial and its feminist commitments with equal rigor.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's critique of "Western feminism" in her foundational essay "Under Western Eyes" (1984) is also directly relevant here. Mohanty's argument that Western feminist

scholarship has tended to construct "Third World women" as a homogeneous, undifferentiated group of victims of patriarchy, thereby producing a "discursive colonialism" that reproduces the very structures of Western superiority that anticolonial politics challenges, resonates with the tradition's broader critique of Western academic representations of Bangladesh and Bangladeshi culture. The tradition's insistence on the specificity of Bangladeshi conditions and the inadequacy of universalizing frameworks that abstract from those conditions applies equally to feminist frameworks as to other forms of Western scholarly analysis.

69.4 The Resources for a Feminist Dimension of the Tradition

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is not irredeemably androcentric. It contains within it significant resources for the development of a feminist dimension that would engage seriously with gender as a fundamental analytical category while maintaining the tradition's specific analytical strengths: its historical grounding, its commitment to the specificity of Bangladeshi conditions, its integration of multiple theoretical frameworks, and its orientation toward the practical political project of genuine liberation.

The most important of these resources is the tradition's own normative framework. The tradition's commitment to equality, human dignity, and social justice is a commitment that, taken seriously, requires the full inclusion of women as equal agents in the political, intellectual, and cultural life of Bangladesh. The tradition's critique of social hierarchies that are maintained by the exclusion of specific groups from full participation in social and political life applies, by its own logic, to the gender hierarchy that excludes women from full participation in intellectual and public life. The tradition has not always drawn out the full implications of this logic, but the logic is there, and a feminist extension of the tradition would not require abandoning its fundamental commitments but rather extending and deepening their application.

The second resource is the tradition's engagement with the Sufi and syncretic dimensions of Bengali Muslim religious and cultural life. The Baul and Sufi traditions of Bengal have generally been characterized by a more egalitarian approach to gender than the orthodox Islamic tradition, with women playing significant roles as spiritual teachers and musicians, and with the tradition's understanding of the divine as transcending gender categories. The tradition's defense of the Sufi and Baul heritage against orthodox Islamist attack is thus also, potentially, a defense of the more egalitarian gender relations that have characterized these traditions, and could serve as the foundation for a feminist engagement with Islamic tradition that is grounded in the specific conditions of Bengali Muslim religious life rather than in Western feminist frameworks.

The third resource is the tradition's engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis, which, despite its own significant limitations from a feminist perspective, including its tendency to universalize a specific masculine subject position and its complex relationship to the question of sexual difference, has also been productively used by feminist thinkers including Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Juliet Mitchell to develop analyses of the psychic dimensions of gender oppression and of the conditions for women's genuine subjectivity and agency. Khan's sophisticated engagement with Lacanian theory could be extended to engage with the feminist dimensions of the Lacanian tradition in ways that would enrich the tradition's analytical framework while addressing one of its most significant current limitations.

CHAPTER SEVENTY: SYNTHESIS, SPECIFICITY, AND THE UNIVERSAL SIGNIFICANCE OF A BANGLADESHI PHILOSOPHICAL PROJECT

What the Comparative Perspective Reveals and What Remains Irreducibly Specific

70.1 The Universal Questions Behind the Specific Analysis

Having conducted the comparative analyses of Chapters Sixty-One through Sixty-Nine, we are now in a position to draw some broader conclusions about the nature and significance of the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, and about what the comparative perspective reveals that could not have been seen without it.

The first and most important conclusion is that the questions the tradition engages with are universal questions: questions that arise in every postcolonial society that has undertaken the serious intellectual project of thinking through the conditions and possibilities of genuine liberation. The question of how a people that has been subjected to colonial domination can recover its cultural confidence and develop intellectual frameworks adequate to its own conditions of existence, rather than simply importing and applying frameworks developed for the conditions of the metropolitan power, is a question that has been addressed, in different ways and with different analytical tools, by every intellectual tradition we have examined in this part: by the Subaltern Studies collective, by the African postcolonial tradition, by the Latin American critical tradition, by the global Islamic modernist tradition, and by the academic postcolonial theory tradition. The Bangladeshi tradition's engagement with this question is not unique in its fundamental orientation, but it is distinctive in its specific character: in the specific theoretical tools it has used, the specific historical conditions it has engaged with, and the specific analytical conclusions it has drawn.

The question of the relationship between Islamic identity and modern political and intellectual life is also a universal question within the Muslim world, one that has generated a rich and diverse tradition of intellectual responses from Morocco to Malaysia. The Bangladeshi tradition's specific approach to this question, rooted in the specific history of Islam in Bengal and in the specific political conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh, is one contribution to this broader Islamic intellectual conversation, and the comparison with other contributions, particularly those of Iqbal, Shariati, and Bennabi, reveals both what is distinctive about the Bangladeshi approach and what it shares with other attempts to navigate the same fundamental intellectual challenge.

The question of the relationship between language and power, between the choice of medium and the possibilities of intellectual and political life, is a question that the Bangladeshi tradition shares with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in Kenya, with the defenders of vernacular intellectual traditions in Latin America, with the Subaltern Studies collective's engagement with the question of which languages count as languages of serious scholarship, and with the broader global movement for what scholars like Walter Dignolo have called "epistemic decoloniality," the challenge to the metropolitan monopoly on legitimate knowledge production. The Bangladeshi tradition's specific approach to this question, grounded in the specific situation of the Bengali language and in the

specific conditions of Bangladeshi intellectual and educational life, is one of the most sustained and most seriously argued contributions to this global conversation that has been produced in any non-metropolitan language.

70.2 The Irreducibly Specific Character of the Bangladeshi Tradition

At the same time, the comparative analysis has also revealed what is irreducibly specific about the Bangladeshi tradition: the dimensions of its intellectual project that cannot be explained by reference to the universal questions it engages with or the theoretical frameworks it has borrowed from other traditions, but that reflect the specific historical, cultural, and political conditions of Bangladesh and of Bengali Muslim intellectual life.

The most fundamental of these irreducibly specific dimensions is the tradition's grounding in the specific history and culture of the Bengal delta and the Bengali Muslim community. The tradition's engagement with the Language Movement of 1952, with the Liberation War of 1971, with the specific dynamics of Bangladeshi political development from Sheikh Mujibur Rahman through the military governments of the 1970s and 1980s and the competitive authoritarianism of the 1990s and 2000s to the upheaval of 2024, with the specific forms of Sufi spirituality and syncretic religious practice that have characterized Bengali Muslim religious life, and with the specific dynamics of Bangladeshi intellectual culture, including the distinctive oral philosophical tradition that Abdur Razzaq embodied and the specific form of prophetic cultural criticism that Ahmed Sofa developed, all reflect conditions that are not duplicated anywhere else in the world and that give the tradition its distinctive character.

A second irreducibly specific dimension is the three-generational structure of the tradition itself. The specific relationship between Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, the teacher who taught through questioning, the disciple who taught through declaration, and the disciple's disciple who has taught through theoretical synthesis, is a relationship that has shaped the intellectual character of the tradition in ways that are not fully explicable by reference to any of the theoretical frameworks the tradition has employed. The tradition's characteristic combination of Socratic indirection, prophetic declaration, and theoretical rigor reflects the specific personalities and intellectual styles of its three major figures, and the specific ways in which these different styles have interacted, conflicted, and complemented each other over more than seven decades of intellectual life.

A third irreducibly specific dimension is the tradition's positioning in the contemporary political landscape of Bangladesh in 2026. The tradition's specific engagements in the post-2024 political situation, its navigation of the complex relationships between secular nationalism, Islamist politics, student politics, and democratic reform, and its specific attempts to articulate a vision of Bangladeshi political and intellectual life adequate to the challenges of the current moment, are all grounded in conditions that are not duplicated elsewhere and that give the tradition's current work a character that is both continuous with its historical development and specifically responsive to the present moment.

70.3 What the Tradition Contributes to the Global Conversation

The comparative perspective of Part Seven also allows us to identify more clearly what the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan contributes to the global intellectual conversation about postcolonial modernity, decolonization, and the conditions of genuine liberation. This contribution has several dimensions.

The first is the tradition's specific combination of theoretical sophistication and political groundedness. The academic postcolonial theory tradition, as we have seen, has developed considerable theoretical sophistication in its analysis of colonial discourse, cultural hybridity, and the conditions of postcolonial subjectivity, but has sometimes done so at the cost of political groundedness, producing work that is theoretically elegant but disconnected from the specific political struggles and possibilities of specific postcolonial societies. The Latin American and African critical traditions have been more politically grounded, but have sometimes been less theoretically rigorous than the situation demands. The Bangladeshi tradition, with its combination of Lacanian psychoanalytic analysis, Marxist political economy, historical materialist engagement with the specific conditions of Bangladeshi development, and Sufi spiritual philosophy, represents a distinctive synthesis of theoretical sophistication and political groundedness that is a genuine contribution to the global repertoire of analytical frameworks for thinking about postcolonial conditions.

The second contribution is the tradition's specific engagement with the relationship between Islamic identity and democratic politics. As we have seen, this is one of the most urgent questions facing Muslim-majority societies in the twenty-first century, and the Bangladeshi tradition's specific approach to it, grounded in the history of Islam in Bengal and in the specific conditions of Bangladeshi political life, represents a genuinely distinctive contribution to the global debate. The tradition's insistence that Islamic identity and democratic governance are compatible, combined with its specific critique of the political formations that claim Islamic identity in Bangladesh, and its defense of the Sufi and syncretic heritage of Bengal against both secular dismissal and orthodox Islamist attack, constitutes a political theology of Bengali Muslim democratic life that has no close equivalent in any other intellectual tradition.

The third contribution is the tradition's analysis of the relationship between language, knowledge, and power in postcolonial conditions. The tradition's sustained argument for Bengali-medium education, its critique of the epistemic injustice involved in treating English as the natural medium of serious thought in Bangladesh, and its insistence on the legitimacy and the necessity of developing serious intellectual work in Bengali, represent a contribution to the global debate about linguistic decolonization that is grounded in the specific conditions of one of the world's great literary languages and one of the world's most significant Language Movements. This contribution is especially valuable because it is not merely theoretical: it is embodied in the actual practice of the tradition, in the sustained work of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan in developing serious philosophical, political, and cultural analysis in Bengali, thereby demonstrating in practice what they argue for in theory.

The fourth contribution is the tradition's oral philosophical dimension. The figure of Abdur Razzaq, the philosopher who never published a book but whose thinking shaped the intellectual development of generations of scholars and politicians, is a figure for whom there is no close equivalent in the academic postcolonial theory tradition, and whose existence and influence raise

important questions about the relationship between oral and written modes of intellectual transmission, about the conditions of philosophical dialogue and Socratic inquiry, and about the ways in which intellectual traditions are formed and transmitted that go beyond what can be captured by the standard models of academic intellectual history. The Razzaqian tradition of oral philosophical inquiry, with its insistence on the importance of the intellectual relationship between teacher and student, its cultivation of productive ambiguity and the refusal of premature synthesis, and its grounding of philosophical reflection in the concrete conditions of specific lives and specific communities, is a contribution to the global repertoire of philosophical practice that deserves wider recognition.

70.4 The Tradition's Unresolved Questions and Its Future Development

The comparative perspective of Part Seven also allows us to identify more clearly the unresolved questions and the gaps in the tradition's analytical framework that point toward the directions in which its future development must proceed.

The most significant unresolved question is the relationship between the tradition's commitment to gender equality and its actual engagement with the specific conditions of women's lives in Bangladesh. As we have seen in Chapter Sixty-Nine, the tradition has not adequately developed the feminist dimensions of its analytical framework, and a genuinely comprehensive account of Bangladeshi social and political life requires a sustained engagement with gender as a fundamental analytical category that the tradition has not yet provided. The resources for this engagement are present within the tradition, and the tradition's own normative commitments require it, but the work of actually developing it remains to be done by the thinkers who will extend the tradition in the coming decades.

A second unresolved question is the relationship between the tradition's political commitments and its theory of political agency. The tradition is committed to genuine democratic transformation, to the development of a Bangladeshi political life that genuinely serves the interests of all its citizens rather than the interests of elite networks. But it has not developed an adequate account of how this transformation is to be achieved, of what the specific mechanisms and conditions of political change are, and of what role the tradition's own intellectual work plays in contributing to that change. The comparison with other postcolonial intellectual traditions, particularly the Gramscian tradition and the Latin American critical tradition, suggests that a more developed theory of political agency and political strategy is necessary if the tradition's analytical insights are to be connected more directly to the political project of transformation that they are meant to serve.

A third unresolved question concerns the tradition's relationship to the environmental crisis that is presenting Bangladesh with some of its most urgent and most difficult challenges. Bangladesh is one of the countries most acutely threatened by climate change: sea level rise, increased cyclone intensity, river flooding, and saltwater intrusion are already affecting millions of Bangladeshis, and the trajectory of climate change suggests that these impacts will intensify dramatically in the coming decades. The tradition's analytical framework, with its primary focus on the political, cultural, and epistemological dimensions of postcolonial life, has not yet adequately engaged with the specific ways in which environmental conditions shape and

constrain the possibilities of social and political development, and with the specific analytical challenges that climate change and ecological degradation present for a tradition committed to both social justice and ecological sustainability.

A fourth and final unresolved question concerns the tradition's engagement with the global digital transformation and its specific implications for Bangladeshi intellectual and political life. The digital revolution has transformed the conditions of intellectual production, distribution, and reception in ways that have specific implications for the tradition's concerns: the possibility of producing and distributing intellectual work in Bengali without the institutional and commercial barriers that have traditionally limited the reach of Bengali-language intellectual production, the emergence of new forms of political organization and mobilization, as evidenced in the student movement of 2024, that make use of digital communication platforms in ways that challenge existing models of political agency and political organization, and the specific forms of cultural colonialism that the digital economy's domination by a handful of Anglophone platforms creates for the millions of Bengali-speaking users who engage with those platforms primarily in languages other than English. The tradition's framework contains the resources for engaging with these questions, but the work of actually doing so remains largely undone.

70.5 The Legacy Reconsidered: Seven Decades of Bangladeshi Philosophical Work

As Part Seven draws toward its conclusion, it is worth stepping back from the specific comparative analyses and the specific gaps and unresolved questions they reveal to offer a broader assessment of what the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has achieved over more than seven decades of intellectual work.

What the comparative perspective of Part Seven reveals, above all, is the depth and the originality of this achievement. The tradition has not merely applied existing theoretical frameworks to Bangladeshi conditions. It has developed, through sustained engagement with the specific conditions of Bangladeshi and Bengali Muslim life and through creative synthesis of theoretical resources from diverse traditions, an analytical framework that is genuinely adequate to the complexity of those conditions and genuinely capable of illuminating their most significant dimensions. The tradition's analysis of colonial psychology and postcolonial political culture, its engagement with the relationship between Islamic identity and democratic politics, its defense of Bengali language and culture as conditions of genuine epistemic sovereignty, and its development of oral philosophical practice as a form of intellectual and political engagement, all represent contributions that are genuinely original and genuinely valuable, not merely within the specific Bangladeshi context but within the broader global conversation about the conditions and possibilities of postcolonial modernity.

The tradition has achieved this under conditions that have been consistently unfavorable: conditions of political instability and authoritarian recurrence, of institutional indifference and sometimes active hostility, of economic marginalization and social controversy, and of the systematic devaluation that the global knowledge economy inflicts on intellectual work produced in non-metropolitan languages and non-metropolitan institutions. That the tradition has maintained its intellectual quality, its political independence, and its moral seriousness under these conditions is itself a form of achievement, and one that reflects the specific qualities of the

three figures at its center: Razzaq's Socratic indirection and philosophical patience, Sofa's prophetic declaration and moral courage, and Khan's theoretical rigor and political engagement.

The tradition is not finished. It is a living tradition, actively developed by Salimullah Khan in his teaching at North South University and in his continued writing and public intellectual engagement, and by the next generation of Bangladeshi thinkers who have been shaped by the tradition and who are extending it in new directions. The political upheaval of 2024 has opened new possibilities and new challenges for Bangladeshi intellectual and political life, and the tradition's framework will be tested and developed by the specific demands of this new moment in ways that cannot yet be fully anticipated. What can be said with confidence is that the tradition provides the most comprehensive and most sophisticated analytical framework available for understanding the specific conditions of Bangladeshi life, and that engaging seriously with it is a condition of genuinely understanding the Bangladesh that is being made and remade in the crucible of the current moment.

SUMMARY OF PART SEVEN

Part Seven has conducted the most extensive and systematic comparative analysis yet undertaken of the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, placing it in dialogue with a series of global intellectual traditions that illuminate different dimensions of its intellectual project while also revealing its irreducibly specific character.

The analysis began with a methodological account of the comparative method and its specific challenges in the context of postcolonial intellectual history, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a double focus on both the universality of the questions engaged and the specificity of the conditions within which they are engaged. It then proceeded through a series of comparative analyses, each of which revealed something important about the tradition that could not have been seen without the comparative perspective.

The comparison with the South Asian intellectual tradition, examined in Chapter Sixty-Two, revealed the tradition's complex relationship with the common South Asian colonial inheritance, its specific differentiation from both the Indian and Pakistani intellectual traditions, its ambivalent engagement with the Tagorean inheritance, its critical relationship with the Subaltern Studies project, and the gap in its coverage represented by its limited engagement with the anti-caste intellectual tradition.

The comparison with the African postcolonial tradition, examined in Chapter Sixty-Three, revealed the close structural parallels between the tradition's concerns and those of Fanon, Cabral, Senghor, and Ngugi, while also highlighting important differences: the tradition's refusal of cultural essentialism in contrast to Negritude, its more politically grounded engagement with the language question compared to Ngugi's more radical break with the metropolitan language, and the specific dimensions of the Fanonist analysis of colonial violence that the tradition has engaged with incompletely.

The comparison with the Latin American critical tradition, examined in Chapter Sixty-Four, revealed the structural parallels between the tradition's analysis of postcolonial economic dependency and the dependency theory tradition, the deep affinities between the tradition's educational philosophy and Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, the illuminating parallels with liberation theology's attempt to synthesize religious commitment and structural social analysis, and the comparison with Mariategui's "heroic creation" as a model for the tradition's own attempt to synthesize diverse theoretical resources in the service of understanding a specific social reality.

The comparison with the global Islamic intellectual tradition, examined in Chapter Sixty-Five, revealed the tradition's specific positioning within the broader tradition of Islamic intellectual renewal, its affinities with and differences from the projects of Iqbal, Shariati, and Bennabi, and its distinctive contribution to the global debate about the relationship between Islamic identity and democratic politics, while also revealing the gap in the tradition's framework represented by the absence of a developed positive vision of Islamic democratic politics to complement its analytical and critical framework.

The comparison with European critical theory, examined in Chapter Sixty-Six, revealed the tradition's selective and productive engagement with the Frankfurt School, Gramscian cultural politics, Althusserian structural analysis, and Lacanian psychoanalysis, while also revealing the tensions between the tradition's commitments and certain dimensions of the European critical theory tradition, particularly the tension between Habermasian discourse ethics and the tradition's more historically grounded and more politically urgent approach to normative political analysis.

The comparison with the academic postcolonial theory tradition, examined in Chapter Sixty-Eight, revealed both the affinities and the significant tensions between the tradition and the work of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha, with the most important difference being the institutional context within which the tradition has been developed and the political groundedness that this context has produced, in contrast to the theoretical sophistication but sometimes political remoteness of the academic postcolonial project.

The comparison with feminist philosophy, examined in Chapter Sixty-Nine, revealed one of the tradition's most significant limitations: its relative neglect of gender as a fundamental analytical category and its incomplete engagement with the specific forms of oppression and exclusion that have structured the lives of Bangladeshi women. The analysis identified significant resources within the tradition for the development of a feminist dimension, including the tradition's own normative framework, its engagement with the Sufi and syncretic traditions' more egalitarian approach to gender, and the potential feminist dimensions of the Lacanian theoretical framework, while also insisting on the necessity of more direct engagement with the global feminist philosophical tradition.

The concluding Chapter Seventy drew together the findings of the comparative analyses to offer a broader assessment of the tradition's achievement, its specific contributions to the global conversation about postcolonial modernity, and its unresolved questions and gaps that point toward the directions of its future development. The central conclusion is that the tradition of

Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is a genuinely original and genuinely valuable contribution to the global intellectual project of thinking through the conditions and possibilities of postcolonial liberation: a contribution that is both rooted in the specific conditions of Bangladeshi and Bengali Muslim life and relevant to the universal questions that face every postcolonial society attempting to develop the intellectual and political resources for genuine freedom.

Part Eight will turn to the specific institutional dimensions of the tradition: the universities, the journals, the publishing houses, the cultural organizations, and the political formations through which the tradition has been produced, disseminated, contested, and developed, and the ways in which these institutional dimensions have shaped the tradition's intellectual character and its political significance.

End of Part Seven

Editorial Note: The textbook continues with Part Eight, which addresses the institutional dimensions of the tradition, and Parts Nine and Ten, which address its pedagogical implications and its significance for the Bangladesh of 2026 and beyond. The general editor wishes to acknowledge the assistance of the contributors to this volume, whose collective scholarship has made the synthesis of Part Seven possible, and to express gratitude to the librarians and archivists of Dhaka University, the Bangla Academy, and the National University of Bangladesh, whose custodianship of the primary sources on which this work draws is itself a form of intellectual and cultural service to the tradition we have examined.

PART EIGHT

THE INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF THOUGHT: UNIVERSITIES, PUBLISHING HOUSES, CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS, JOURNALS, AND THE SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF AN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

PREFATORY NOTE TO PART EIGHT

Every intellectual tradition requires an infrastructure. Ideas do not travel by themselves. They require institutions: universities that provide the time and the resources for sustained inquiry, publishing houses that give intellectual work material form and public circulation, journals that create spaces for scholarly argument and debate, cultural organizations that connect intellectual work to broader public life, and political formations that allow ideas to become forces in the practical world of social and political struggle. The tradition of Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan has been both shaped by and in conflict with the specific institutional landscape

of Bangladeshi intellectual and cultural life, and the story of that relationship is essential to understanding both the achievements of the tradition and the obstacles it has faced.

Part Eight undertakes the systematic examination of the institutional dimensions of the tradition that Part Seven's concluding summary identified as necessary for a complete understanding of its intellectual project. The analysis proceeds through a series of institutional domains: the universities within which the three major figures worked and taught, the Bangla Academy as the state's primary institutional expression of its commitment to Bengali language and culture, the publishing houses and the book trade that have given the tradition's work material form and public circulation, the journals and periodicals that have provided spaces for intellectual argument, the cultural organizations through which intellectual work has been connected to broader social and political life, and the digital media landscape that has transformed the conditions of intellectual production and reception since the late 1990s. Each domain is examined both in its historical development and in its current condition as of 2025 and 2026, with particular attention to the ways in which the specific institutional conditions of each domain have shaped the tradition's intellectual work and the ways in which the tradition has in turn shaped those institutional conditions.

The analysis is not merely descriptive. It is also critical: the institutional landscape of Bangladeshi intellectual and cultural life has been, as the tradition itself has consistently argued, deeply marked by the legacies of colonialism, by the specific pathologies of Bangladeshi political culture including its patterns of political patronage and partisan control of nominally independent institutions, and by the structural disadvantages of operating in a language and in institutions that the global knowledge economy systematically marginalizes. Understanding these institutional conditions is essential for understanding why the tradition has developed as it has, and for assessing the prospects for its continued development in the new political landscape of Bangladesh in 2026.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE: THE UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA AND THE INTELLECTUAL FORMATION OF A NATION

The Oxford of the East and Its Complicated Legacy

71.1 The Founding Vision and Its Contradictions

The University of Dhaka, established in 1921, was from its founding a site of intellectual and political ferment that both enabled and constrained the development of the intellectual tradition we are examining. The university was established in the specific political context of the reversal of the Bengal Partition: as the partition's reversal in 1911 had disappointed Muslim political leaders who had seen the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam as a space for Muslim political and cultural development, the university was conceived partly as a form of compensation, a gesture of recognition toward the Muslim majority of eastern Bengal that would provide educational opportunities for a community that had been significantly underrepresented in the existing higher educational institutions of undivided Bengal.

This founding context gave the University of Dhaka a specific institutional character from its beginning: it was a Muslim-majority institution in a way that the older universities of the subcontinent were not, and it was from its earliest years a site of encounter between the intellectual traditions of the Bengali Muslim community and the specific forms of modern secular university education that the colonial administration promoted. The tensions inherent in this encounter, between the specifically Islamic educational traditions that had formed the intellectual life of the Bengali Muslim community for centuries and the modern secular disciplines that the colonial university promoted, between the specific cultural and linguistic traditions of Bengali Muslim life and the English-medium educational culture of the colonial elite, and between the academic aspirations of the university's students and faculty and the specific political conditions of colonial and subsequently postcolonial rule, have never been fully resolved, and they remain active in the University of Dhaka's institutional life today.

Abdur Razzaq spent the entirety of his academic career at the University of Dhaka, joining as a lecturer in the Department of Political Economy in 1936 and continuing to be associated with the university until his death in 1999. His entire intellectual life was thus lived within this institution, and the specific conditions of the institution, its strengths and its weaknesses, its possibilities and its constraints, shaped his intellectual work in ways that were not always visible to him or to those who observed him. The university's specific culture of intellectual sociality, the culture of conversation and debate in common rooms, libraries, and faculty offices that characterized the humanities and social sciences at their best, provided the specific social context within which Razzaq's oral philosophical practice developed. His seminars and conversations were not merely informal intellectual events. They were institutional events in the specific sense that they took place within the institutional context of a research university, within the social world of faculty, students, and administrators that the university constituted, and their significance was partly a function of that institutional context.

71.2 The Political Colonization of Dhaka University

The history of the University of Dhaka in the postcolonial period is, in significant part, a history of the progressive political colonization of an institution that had in its early decades maintained a degree of intellectual and institutional independence. The specific mechanisms of this colonization have varied across different political periods, but the underlying pattern has been consistent: the governing party of the day has consistently sought to control the university's administration, to install politically loyal figures in key positions, to use the student wing of the ruling party as an instrument of physical intimidation of political opponents, and to manipulate the appointment processes for academic positions in ways that have systematically rewarded political loyalty over intellectual merit.

The student political organizations associated with the major Bangladeshi political parties, and particularly the student wings of the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, have played a particularly significant and particularly damaging role in this process. The Chhatra League, the student wing of the Awami League, and the Jatiyotabadi Chhatra Dal, the student wing of the BNP, have at various points in the history of the University of Dhaka controlled access to dormitory accommodation, dominated student union elections through intimidation and fraud, and enforced political conformity through threats and physical violence in ways that have

profoundly damaged the university's academic culture. The specific manifestation of this problem under the Hasina government, which governed Bangladesh from 2009 through 2024, involved particularly systematic and egregious forms of Chhatra League control over university life, including the use of dormitory assignments as rewards for political loyalty, the intimidation and assault of politically independent students, and the complicity or active participation of university administrators in these practices.

This situation is not merely a problem of student politics in a narrow sense. It is a profound institutional problem that has systematically damaged the intellectual culture of the University of Dhaka by creating conditions in which intellectual independence is penalized and political conformity is rewarded. The damage is not only to the students who are directly affected by the intimidation and the political manipulation of dormitory access. It is to the entire intellectual culture of the institution, because the persistence of these practices over decades has created a norm of political accommodation and intellectual timidity that has shaped the expectations and the behavior of both students and faculty in ways that are deeply inimical to the conditions of genuine intellectual inquiry.

The student uprising of 2024, which brought down the Hasina government and initiated a new political period in Bangladesh, included among its specific grievances precisely this pattern of Chhatra League control over university life. The students who led the movement were in significant part motivated by the accumulated resentment of years of intimidation, discrimination, and political manipulation within the university system, and their demands included not only political changes at the national level but also the reform of the specific institutional practices that had made universities spaces of political control rather than genuine intellectual inquiry. The post-2024 period has seen some initial attempts at institutional reform, but the depth and sustainability of these reforms remains uncertain, and the structural conditions that have made the political colonization of Bangladeshi universities possible are deeply rooted in the political economy and the institutional culture of the society.

71.3 Razzaq's Institutional Resistance and Its Pedagogical Significance

Within this problematic institutional context, Abdur Razzaq's specific institutional practice takes on a significance that goes beyond its individual intellectual dimensions. Razzaq's refusal to participate in the partisan political culture of the university, his maintenance of genuine intellectual independence across decades of political change and political pressure, his willingness to engage seriously with students and colleagues regardless of their political affiliations, and his consistent modeling of intellectual integrity as the primary academic virtue, all represent forms of institutional resistance to the colonization of intellectual life by partisan politics that were as significant in their institutional as in their intellectual dimensions.

Razzaq's seminars and conversations, which took place in his home as well as in the university, were spaces that maintained a form of genuine intellectual openness that was increasingly rare within the formal institutional spaces of the university. The combination of the university's formal institutional context, which provided the social world within which Razzaq's interlocutors were formed, and the informal spaces of his home and garden, which provided the physical setting for his most sustained intellectual engagements, created a distinctive institutional hybrid:

neither fully inside the university's formal structures nor fully outside them, but occupying a liminal space that allowed a degree of intellectual freedom that the formal structures increasingly constrained.

This institutional hybrid is itself a philosophical statement about the conditions of genuine intellectual inquiry. The university's formal structures, with their requirements of publication, credentialing, examination, and institutional accountability, are necessary conditions for the maintenance of the intellectual tradition in a form that can be transmitted across generations. But they are not sufficient conditions: the genuine intellectual life that those structures are meant to serve requires spaces of informal exchange, open debate, and genuine mutual inquiry that the formal structures often inhibit rather than facilitate. Razzaq's institutional practice maintained both the formal and the informal dimensions of intellectual life, and his example suggests that the conditions of genuine intellectual inquiry require an institutional ecology that includes both: the formal structures that provide the resources and the social world of intellectual engagement, and the informal spaces that allow genuine freedom of thought.

71.4 The Post-2024 Institutional Reforms and the University System

The political transformation of 2024 has created new possibilities and new uncertainties for the university system in Bangladesh. The post-2024 interim government, led by Professor Muhammad Yunus, has engaged in a series of institutional reform initiatives that have included the university system among their targets. The specific reforms proposed and implemented have included changes to the governance structures of the universities, attempts to address the specific problems of political partisanship in faculty recruitment and student politics, and broader discussions of the need to raise the academic quality of Bangladeshi universities, which, as discussed in the context of the 2026 rankings, remain significantly below the standards of the best Asian universities.

The specific question of the University of Dhaka's academic quality is particularly acute. No Bangladeshi university appears in the top 500 of the QS World University Rankings, with Dhaka University and BUET remaining in the 800 to 1000 band. [The Financial Express](#) This institutional mediocrity is not a mere matter of reputation or prestige. It reflects real conditions of intellectual life: fewer than 20 per cent of Bangladeshi graduates are prepared for knowledge-intensive industries, [The Financial Express](#) a figure that reflects not merely the failure of individual students but the systemic failure of institutions to provide the conditions of genuine intellectual formation. Many elite public universities recruit predominantly from their own graduates, constraining intellectual diversity and leading to academic inbreeding that narrows research ecosystems. [The Financial Express](#)

For the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, these institutional conditions are not merely background facts. They are the specific conditions within which the tradition has had to work, and their persistence represents one of the central obstacles to the tradition's goal of developing a genuinely critical intellectual culture in Bangladesh. The tradition's analysis of these conditions is itself a contribution to the reform agenda, providing an intellectual framework for understanding why the university system has developed as it has and what genuine reform would require. But the tradition's contribution to reform is primarily intellectual rather than

administrative, and the gap between intellectual analysis and institutional transformation is one of the central challenges that the tradition's project faces in 2026.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO: NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY AND THE PRIVATE UNIVERSITY LANDSCAPE

The Tradition's Contemporary Institutional Home and Its Contradictions

72.1 The Rise of the Private University Sector

The expansion of the private university sector in Bangladesh since the early 1990s has fundamentally transformed the landscape of higher education in the country. From a system dominated by a small number of public universities, Bangladeshi higher education has become a system of over 170 institutions, the majority private, that vary enormously in quality, resources, and institutional mission. The QS World University Rankings 2026 included 14 Bangladeshi universities in its global list of over 1,500 institutions, [WinTK](#) a figure that reflects the expansion of the sector even as it also reflects the continued dominance of the older public universities in terms of academic quality and prestige.

The private universities have been shaped by the specific dynamics of the market for higher education in Bangladesh: the demand for credentials from a rapidly expanding urban middle class, the specific employment needs of Bangladesh's garment industry-led development model, and the specific prestige hierarchies that govern the choices of Bangladeshi families about their children's education. These market dynamics have not always been conducive to the development of the kinds of liberal arts and social science education that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan values: the market rewards professional credentials in business, engineering, and information technology more than the humanistic and social scientific education that produces the kind of critical intellectual culture the tradition advocates.

North South University, where Salimullah Khan currently teaches in the Department of History and Philosophy, occupies an interesting institutional position in this landscape. It was one of the first private universities in Bangladesh, founded in 1992, and it has developed a reputation as one of the more academically serious private institutions, with more substantial research activity and more rigorous academic standards than many of its competitors. Khan's colleague Dr. Mahbubur Rahman serves as Professor and Chair of History and Philosophy at North South University and Director of its Liberation War Research Center, whose scholarship focuses on authoritarianism, democratization, electoral governance, and refugee repatriation, [Bangladeshfutureforum](#) suggesting that the department within which Khan works maintains a degree of serious intellectual engagement with the political and historical questions that the tradition has consistently addressed.

72.2 The Private University and the Language Question

The private university sector's relationship to the language question is particularly significant for the tradition's concerns. The majority of private universities in Bangladesh use English as the primary medium of instruction, a choice that reflects the market's demand for English-language credentials and the career advantages that English fluency provides in Bangladesh's specific labor market. This English-medium orientation is, in Salimullah Khan's analysis, a particularly acute form of the colonial epistemological hierarchy that the tradition has consistently identified and criticized: the assumption built into the very institutional structure of the private university sector that serious academic work is conducted in English rather than in Bengali, and that the skills and knowledge that can only be fully expressed in Bengali are somehow less valuable than those that can be expressed in English.

Khan's position within North South University is therefore not without its institutional tensions. He teaches in an institution whose very educational model is, in certain important respects, at odds with the specific positions he advocates most forcefully: the primacy of Bengali as the medium of intellectual life, the critique of English-medium educational institutions as instruments of the reproduction of colonial hierarchies, and the insistence that genuine intellectual development requires engagement with the specific cultural and linguistic traditions of the Bengali Muslim community rather than the acquisition of skills adapted to the requirements of a globally competitive economy denominated in English. These tensions are not hidden or denied within the tradition: they are acknowledged as part of the specific conditions under which intellectual work must be conducted in contemporary Bangladesh, conditions that require navigating between the institutional necessities of academic employment and the intellectual and political commitments that give academic work its meaning and significance.

The tradition's response to this tension is characteristic of its broader intellectual approach: not a simple rejection of the institutional conditions that create the tension, but a sustained critical engagement with them that attempts to use the institutional resources available while simultaneously exposing and challenging the epistemic hierarchies those institutions embody. Khan's teaching at North South University is not merely a professional accommodation to institutional necessity. It is also an attempt to introduce into an English-medium private university the kinds of critical intellectual engagement with Bengali language, culture, history, and politics that the institution's dominant educational model discourages, thereby challenging from within the assumptions that structure that model.

72.3 The Institutional Comparison: Public versus Private

The comparison between the public and private university sectors is itself analytically instructive for understanding the specific conditions of intellectual life in contemporary Bangladesh. The public universities, particularly the University of Dhaka, have the prestige, the traditions, and the institutional memory that the private sector lacks: they are the institutions that produced the intellectual figures of the tradition we are examining, and their specific cultures of intellectual sociality, including the traditions of student politics, faculty debate, and public intellectual engagement that have characterized university life at its best, have been essential conditions for the development of the tradition's intellectual work.

But the public universities have also been most severely damaged by the political colonization that the tradition has analyzed, and their academic quality has suffered accordingly. The private sector, by contrast, is somewhat more protected from direct political interference in academic life, partly because its dependence on student fees rather than government funding gives it a degree of independence from the direct political patronage networks that have colonized the public sector. But the private sector is subject to different forms of colonization: the colonization by market logic that reduces academic work to the production of credentials, and the colonization by the specific cultural presuppositions of an English-medium educational model that reproduces the colonial epistemological hierarchy in a new institutional form.

Neither the public nor the private sector as currently constituted provides the ideal institutional conditions for the kind of intellectual work the tradition advocates. What would be required, in the tradition's framework, is a genuine reform of both sectors: the liberation of the public universities from political patronage and partisan control, and the development of a genuine Bengali-medium alternative to the English-medium private sector that would provide intellectually rigorous education in the specific cultural and linguistic traditions of Bangladeshi life without the market-driven credentialism that has dominated the private sector's development.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE: THE BANGLA ACADEMY AND THE STATE'S RELATIONSHIP TO INTELLECTUAL CULTURE

An Institution's Aspirations, Its Compromises, and Its Continuing Significance

73.1 The Founding of the Bangla Academy and Its Original Mission

The Bangla Academy, established in 1955 in the context of the aftermath of the Language Movement, occupies a unique position in the institutional landscape of Bangladeshi intellectual and cultural life. It was founded explicitly as an institutional expression of the linguistic and cultural aspirations that the Language Movement had brought into sharp relief: the aspiration to create an institutional home for the Bengali language as a language of serious intellectual, literary, and cultural work, to conduct research on Bengali language and literature, to publish Bengali literary and scholarly works, and to promote and develop Bengali culture in its full range and complexity.

The significance of the Bangla Academy's founding in 1955, in the context of East Pakistan, cannot be overstated. At a moment when the Pakistani state was attempting to impose Urdu as the sole official language of the country and to marginalize Bengali in institutional life, the establishment of an academy dedicated to the development and promotion of the Bengali language was itself a political act, a refusal of the cultural subordination that the Pakistani state's language policy was attempting to impose. The academy's founding document, its institutional mission, and its early programs of research, publication, and cultural promotion were all expressions of the specific cultural and political vision that the Language Movement had articulated: the vision of Bengali as a language adequate to the full range of human intellectual

and cultural achievement, capable of serving as the medium for serious scholarship as well as for literary creation.

The Bangla Academy is the official regulatory body of the Bengali language in Bangladesh, an autonomous institution funded by the government of Bangladesh that fosters the Bengali language, literature and culture, works to develop and implement national language policy and conducts original research in Bengali. [Wikipedia](#) The academy has published more than five thousand books and journals, developed comprehensive dictionaries and encyclopedias, established the annual Ekushey Book Fair as the most important event in Bangladesh's literary calendar, and maintained a program of literary awards that has recognized major contributions to Bengali literary and intellectual life across the seven decades of its existence.

73.2 The Bangla Academy and the Tradition

The relationship between the Bangla Academy and the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has been complex and evolving. At its best, the academy has been the institutional expression of the same commitments that animate the tradition: the commitment to Bengali as a language of serious intellectual work, the commitment to the development and promotion of Bengali culture in its full richness and complexity, and the commitment to recognizing and rewarding genuine literary and intellectual achievement in Bengali. The Bangla Academy Literary Award, which has been among the most prestigious cultural recognitions available to Bangladeshi writers and intellectuals, has recognized contributions from figures associated with the tradition, most recently recognizing Salimullah Khan with the Bangla Academy Literary Award in 2024 for his contributions to essays and prose, an award presented on February 1, 2025, at the opening ceremony of the Amar Ekushey Book Fair.

But the relationship has also been marked by tensions and criticisms that reflect the tradition's characteristic refusal to accept institutional recognition without simultaneously engaging critically with the institution conferring the recognition. Salimullah Khan has been critical of the Bangla Academy, opining that the academy is short on original publications, long on dross, and that both in research and in the field of creative writing, originality must be given priority. [Wikipedia](#) This criticism is not merely the complaint of a dissatisfied outsider. It is the substantive critique of a figure who has been deeply engaged with the institution's mission throughout his intellectual career, and who understands from within the specific ways in which the institution has failed to live up to its founding aspirations.

The tradition's critique of the Bangla Academy operates on several levels. At the level of publication quality, it argues that the institution has consistently prioritized quantity over quality, producing large numbers of books and journals of limited scholarly or literary value rather than investing in the sustained development of genuinely original and rigorous intellectual work. At the level of institutional culture, it argues that the academy has been subject to the same patterns of political patronage and partisan control that have damaged the university system, with appointments and publications being shaped by political considerations rather than academic and literary merit. At the level of intellectual vision, it argues that the academy has sometimes interpreted its mission in a conservative and defensive way, focused primarily on the preservation of existing Bengali cultural traditions rather than on the development of new forms

of intellectual and literary expression adequate to the contemporary conditions of Bangladeshi life.

73.3 The Post-2024 Reforms at the Bangla Academy

The post-2024 political transformation has brought new leadership to the Bangla Academy in the form of Professor Mohammad Azam, a scholar of Bengali at the University of Dhaka who was appointed Director General following the formation of the interim government. Professor Mohammad Azam was appointed as the Director General of Bangla Academy for three years on September 5, following the formation of the interim government, and has been working on future work plans, including taking and implementing various activities for qualitative changes and reforms, while upholding the history and tradition of the academy. [Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha](#)

The specific reform initiatives that Professor Azam has outlined include new initiatives to improve the quality of the journals published regularly by Bangla Academy, [Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha](#) a major project to digitize manuscripts in collaboration with the Academy's Manuscripts Section, and the establishment of a writers' center where poets and writers can gather for discussions, book launches, reading circles, and other cultural activities. These reform initiatives are modest but potentially significant: they address real weaknesses in the academy's institutional practice and reflect a genuine awareness of the gap between the academy's aspirations and its achievements.

More significantly for the tradition's concerns, the appointment of Professor Azam, a scholar whose intellectual interests include language, politics, and decolonization in modern Bengal, to the directorship of the academy suggests a shift in the academy's leadership culture toward greater intellectual seriousness and greater engagement with the critical questions about Bengali language, culture, and identity that the tradition has consistently raised. Whether this shift will survive the specific political pressures that have historically constrained the Bangla Academy's institutional independence remains to be seen, but the post-2024 moment represents at least a genuine opening for a more substantive institutional engagement with the tradition's intellectual concerns.

73.4 The Ekushey Book Fair as Cultural Institution and Intellectual Space

The Amar Ekushey Book Fair, the month-long literary event organized by the Bangla Academy every February to commemorate the Language Movement martyrs, has become over the decades one of the most significant cultural institutions in Bangladesh: not merely a commercial event for the book trade but a genuine public intellectual space in which new books are launched, authors engage with readers, scholars present their work, and the entire Bengali-speaking population of Dhaka has the opportunity to engage with the literary and intellectual production of the year.

The significance of the Ekushey Book Fair for the tradition we are examining cannot be overstated. It represents the most sustained and most successful institutional expression of the Language Movement's aspirations: the demonstration, year after year, that Bengali is a language in which serious intellectual and literary work can be produced in quantity, that there is a

genuine public for Bengali-language books across the full range of literary and intellectual genres, and that the cultural life of Bangladesh is capable of sustaining the kind of active and engaged readership that genuine intellectual traditions require.

The Amar Ekushey Boi Mela 2026 was inaugurated by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, with the theme of "Multidimensional Bangladesh," described by Bangla Academy Director General Professor Mohammad Azam as chosen in light of a democratic and inclusive cultural ethos of a new Bangladesh. [Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha](#) The choice of this theme reflects the post-2024 political moment, the aspiration to move beyond the specific forms of cultural and political exclusion that characterized the preceding period toward a more genuinely pluralist and democratic cultural politics. The fair's occurrence during the holy month of Ramadan in 2026 added a further dimension of cultural complexity to its significance, testing the compatibility of the book fair's secular cultural character with the specific religious observances of the majority of its visitors.

The relationship between the tradition and the Ekushey Book Fair has been one of genuine engagement, with all three major figures having been associated with the fair in various capacities: Razzaq as a beloved intellectual presence at discussions organized during the fair, Sofa as a major literary figure whose new works were anticipated events at each year's fair, and Khan as a prolific author whose books are consistently among the most eagerly sought by the fair's visitors and as a participant in the discussions and public events that the fair organizes throughout its month-long duration. The fair is, in a very real sense, the primary public venue in which the tradition's work reaches the broader Bangladeshi public, and its institutional health is therefore directly connected to the conditions of the tradition's reception and influence.

73.5 Controversies at the Bangla Academy

No account of the Bangla Academy's relationship to the tradition would be complete without addressing the specific controversies that have surrounded the institution's management of its awards program and its broader institutional culture. Salimullah Khan's complaint following the 2024 Bangla Academy Literary Award ceremony, in which he publicly expressed dissatisfaction with what he described as the humiliation of awardees at the ceremony, is a revealing episode that illuminates the gap between the institution's aspirations and its actual practice.

The specific nature of Khan's complaint, that the ceremony treated the awardees in a way that was demeaning rather than respectful, reflects a broader pattern in the tradition's relationship to official institutional recognition: the pattern of accepting recognition while refusing to pretend that the recognizing institution is fulfilling its mission adequately. This combination of acceptance and critique is characteristic of the tradition's approach to institutional engagement more broadly: it refuses the posture of pure opposition that would involve rejecting all institutional engagement, while also refusing the posture of gratitude and accommodation that would involve accepting recognition without simultaneously maintaining critical engagement with the institution's failures and limitations.

The controversy also raises broader questions about the relationship between intellectual independence and institutional recognition that are relevant beyond the specific case of the

Bangla Academy. In a society where institutional recognition is both more important and more politically fraught than in societies with stronger traditions of intellectual pluralism and independent institutional life, the question of how to engage with official recognizing institutions without being co-opted by them is genuinely difficult, and the tradition's navigation of this question represents a model of engaged criticism that is worth attending to carefully.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FOUR: PUBLISHING HOUSES, THE BOOK TRADE, AND THE MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF INTELLECTUAL PRODUCTION

From Manuscript to Marketplace: The Political Economy of Bengali Intellectual Life

74.1 The Structure of the Bengali Publishing Industry

The Bengali publishing industry in Bangladesh, like the broader intellectual culture of which it is a part, operates within specific material conditions that have profound implications for the kinds of intellectual work that can be produced and disseminated. Understanding these conditions is essential for understanding both the achievements of the tradition and the specific obstacles it has faced in reaching the audiences and having the influence that its intellectual significance would warrant.

The Bangladeshi publishing industry is concentrated primarily in Dhaka, with the highest concentration in the area around the Bangla Academy and the Nilkhet secondhand book market, which together form the geographic and commercial center of the Bengali-language book trade. The industry is characterized by a large number of small and medium-sized publishers operating on very limited capital, publishing relatively small print runs of typically between one thousand and three thousand copies for most books, and operating without the kind of institutional support, marketing infrastructure, or global distribution networks that characterize the publishing industries of the major metropolitan languages.

These structural conditions have specific implications for the tradition's work. The small print runs that characterize the Bangladeshi publishing industry mean that even highly influential books by the tradition's major figures have typically been available only in limited quantities, going out of print quickly and becoming difficult to obtain except through the secondhand market or through the specific social networks of students, teachers, and intellectuals who pass books among themselves. The absence of robust distribution systems means that the tradition's work is difficult to obtain outside Dhaka, limiting its reach to the readers of the capital city and the diaspora in ways that reinforce the urban-centered and elite-networked character of the tradition's audience.

The financial fragility of the publishing industry also creates specific constraints on what can be published and how. Publishers operating on limited capital and with small print runs have strong incentives to publish work that will sell quickly and in sufficient quantities to recover their investment, which creates pressure toward the kinds of writing that have immediate popular appeal, poetry collections, popular fiction, political commentary, and self-help literature, and

against the kinds of sustained philosophical, historical, or theoretical work that requires extended engagement from readers and that typically sells more slowly and in smaller quantities.

74.2 The Ekushey Book Fair as Publishing Event

The Amar Ekushey Book Fair has become, over the decades, not merely a cultural event but the primary commercial occasion around which the entire Bangladeshi publishing industry organizes its annual activity. The enormous concentration of new book releases in the month of February, timed to coincide with the fair, reflects the market-shaping power of the fair as the primary venue for the commercial launch of new titles. This concentration has both positive and negative implications for the tradition's work.

The positive implication is that the fair creates a genuine mass market for Bengali-language intellectual and literary work, at least for the month of its duration: the crowds of readers who visit the fair create a temporary expansion of the market for serious intellectual work that publishers and authors can exploit to launch new titles that might otherwise struggle to find an audience. The tradition's major figures have consistently timed the publication of their most important new works to coincide with the fair, and the fair has been a significant venue for the public reception and discussion of their work.

The 2025 Bijoy Book Fair, organized in December to complement the February Ekushey fair, attracted participation from major publishing houses including Ananya, Pathak Shamabesh, Utpann, and Mowla Brothers, showcasing new titles across fiction, poetry, history, children's literature, and nonfiction on national heritage, with the theme of Bijoy tying the triumph of independence to the power of knowledge. [Thenewpublishingstandard](#) This development of a second major annual book fair reflects the genuine vitality of the Bengali-language book trade and the expanding commercial and cultural space for Bengali-language intellectual and literary production, a development that is consistent with the tradition's aspiration to create a genuine Bengali-language intellectual culture adequate to the full range of human intellectual and cultural achievement.

The negative implication of the fair's dominance is that it creates a concentration of publication timing that is not necessarily optimal from an intellectual perspective: the pressure to publish in time for the fair can produce work that is rushed or insufficiently developed, and the commercial pressures of the fair environment can distort the reception of intellectual work in ways that favor the immediately accessible over the more demanding. The tradition's most challenging and most rigorous work has sometimes struggled to receive the serious engagement it deserves in the fair environment, where the pressure of commercial activity and the brevity of the fair's duration create conditions more conducive to rapid consumption than to the sustained engagement that rigorous intellectual work requires.

74.3 The Economics of Intellectual Production and the Intellectual's Material Conditions

The specific material conditions of intellectual production in Bangladesh, the conditions within which Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan have actually lived and worked as intellectuals, are an important but rarely examined dimension of the tradition's story. The material conditions of intellectual life

shape intellectual work in ways that are not always visible but that are nonetheless profound: they determine how much time is available for sustained inquiry and reflection, what resources are accessible for research and writing, what pressures of necessity shape the choice of topics and the style of engagement, and what forms of support and recognition are available to sustain the intellectual's commitment to their work over a lifetime.

Abdur Razzaq's material conditions as a university professor were by Bangladeshi standards relatively comfortable, providing him with the institutional resources and the professional time necessary for the sustained intellectual engagement that characterized his career. But his relative comfort came at the specific cost of the academic constraints that all full-time academics face: the requirement to teach particular courses, to participate in the administrative life of the department and the university, and to navigate the specific institutional politics of the University of Dhaka. Razzaq's response to these constraints was characteristic: he fulfilled the minimum institutional requirements necessary to maintain his academic position while investing his real intellectual energies in the informal spaces of conversation, debate, and oral philosophical inquiry that his institutional position made possible without constraining too directly.

Ahmed Sofa's material conditions were significantly more precarious. He was never a full-time academic, and his income depended primarily on his writing, journalism, and the various institutional engagements that his growing literary reputation made available. This precariousness gave Sofa's work a different character from Razzaq's: the urgency and the directness that characterized his writing reflect in part the conditions of a writer who could not afford to be indirect, whose intellectual work had to make its case immediately and persuasively to a general audience rather than developing its arguments over the extended institutional time available to a full-time academic. The specific formal qualities of Sofa's writing, its combination of prophetic declaration, concrete historical analysis, and direct personal address, are not merely reflections of his intellectual personality but are also the formal adaptations of an intellectual whose material conditions required work that could find an audience and generate income in a competitive literary marketplace.

Salimullah Khan's material conditions as a faculty member at private universities have been somewhat more stable than Sofa's precariousness but less institutionally secure than Razzaq's lifetime at the University of Dhaka. The specific conditions of academic employment at private universities in Bangladesh, including the relative absence of tenure protections and the dependence on the continued financial viability of the institution, create a specific form of institutional insecurity that shapes the conditions of intellectual work in ways that are different from but no less significant than the political pressures that have shaped the public university system.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FIVE: JOURNALS, PERIODICALS, AND THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF INTELLECTUAL ARGUMENT

From Praxis Journal to the Contemporary Media of Intellectual Exchange

75.1 The History of Bengali Intellectual Periodicals

The periodical press has been one of the most important institutional vehicles for the development and dissemination of Bengali intellectual culture since the nineteenth century, and its history is inseparable from the history of the intellectual tradition we are examining. The great Bengali literary and intellectual periodicals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including *Bangadarshan*, founded by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1872, *Sabuj Patra*, founded by Pramatha Chowdhury in 1914, and *Shikha*, the journal of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj founded in 1927, were spaces of intellectual ferment in which the Bengali literary and intellectual tradition was actively developed, debated, and transformed. These periodicals provided the specific institutional form within which the Bengali intellectual tradition engaged with the challenges of modernity, colonialism, religious reform, and cultural change, and their legacy continues to shape the institutional landscape of Bengali intellectual life today.

The specific contribution of the periodical press to the tradition we are examining was formative in the cases of all three major figures. Abdur Razzaq was a voracious reader of periodicals as well as books, and his intellectual formation was shaped by his engagement with the full range of Bengali intellectual periodical culture as well as by his reading of English-language academic scholarship. Ahmed Sofa was an active contributor to periodicals throughout his career, and many of his most important essays and critical interventions first appeared in the periodical press before being collected in books. Salimullah Khan began his intellectual public life as the editor of a student periodical, the *Praxis Journal*, during his student days at the University of Dhaka, and has been a regular contributor to newspapers and periodicals throughout his career.

75.2 Praxis Journal and the Formation of a Critical Intellectual Culture

The *Praxis Journal* that Salimullah Khan edited during his student days at the University of Dhaka deserves particular attention as an early and revealing expression of the intellectual formation that the tradition's third major figure was undergoing in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The very title of the journal, invoking the Marxist concept of praxis, the unity of theory and practice, signals the specific intellectual orientation that Khan was developing at this early stage of his career: the conviction that genuine intellectual work is always connected to the practical project of social and political transformation, and that the separation of theory from practice that characterizes academic intellectualism at its most divorced from social reality is itself a form of political accommodation.

The journal's content, which included political and cultural analysis informed by Marxist and other critical theoretical frameworks, represented a form of intellectual practice that was unusual in the Bangladeshi student press of the period, dominated as it was by partisan political publications associated with the various student political organizations. The *Praxis Journal*'s attempt to develop a form of critical intellectual engagement that was independent of the specific partisan alignments of student politics, committed to rigorous theoretical analysis while also engaged with the specific political conditions of Bangladeshi life, anticipated the specific character of Khan's subsequent intellectual work and of the tradition's broader approach to the relationship between intellectual inquiry and political commitment.

75.3 The Contemporary Periodical Landscape and the Tradition's Engagement

The contemporary periodical landscape within which the tradition operates has been transformed by the digital revolution in ways that have both expanded the possibilities for intellectual dissemination and created new challenges for the conditions of sustained intellectual engagement. The proliferation of online news platforms, blogs, and social media has created an enormous expansion of the spaces available for intellectual commentary and debate, but has also created pressures toward the brief and the immediately accessible that are not always conducive to the kinds of sustained and rigorous intellectual argument that the tradition's most important work represents.

The major newspapers and news platforms of Bangladesh, including Prothom Alo, the Daily Star, BDnews24, and their competitors, have been important venues for the tradition's engagement with contemporary political and cultural questions. Salimullah Khan in particular has been a regular contributor to newspaper columns and a frequent participant in the talk shows that have become one of the primary vehicles for public intellectual engagement in Bangladesh, appearing as a commentator on political and cultural questions in a format that requires the compression of complex analytical arguments into brief, accessible forms for a general audience.

This kind of regular engagement with the popular media is both an asset and a challenge for the tradition. It is an asset because it allows the tradition's analytical frameworks to reach a much wider audience than the relatively small number of people who read scholarly books and journals, and because it provides the tradition with a form of ongoing engagement with contemporary political events that keeps it connected to the specific concerns of Bangladeshi public life. It is a challenge because the format of the television talk show and the newspaper column imposes constraints of brevity and accessibility that can reduce the tradition's most rigorous and most complex arguments to simplified talking points, and because the conventions of popular media debate, with their requirements of immediate response and their tendency toward polarization, are not always conducive to the kind of careful, nuanced, and evidence-based analysis that the tradition at its best provides.

75.4 The Bangla Academy Patrika and Academic Intellectual Life

The Bangla Academy Patrika, the quarterly journal published by the Bangla Academy since 1959, is the closest thing to a national journal of Bengali intellectual and literary scholarship that Bangladesh has, and its history reflects the broader history of the Bangla Academy's institutional development, with its periods of genuine intellectual vitality and its periods of decline into the production of what Salimullah Khan has characterized as unoriginal and institutionally servile scholarship.

At its best, the Bangla Academy Patrika has published genuinely significant contributions to the scholarship on Bengali language, literature, and culture, including research articles, critical essays, translations, and documentary publications that have made substantial contributions to the intellectual record of Bengali cultural life. At its worst, it has served as a vehicle for the kind of academically credentialed but intellectually mediocre work that characterizes the journals of many national academic institutions in the postcolonial world: work that meets the formal

requirements of scholarship without generating the genuine intellectual engagement that scholarship at its best produces.

The specific reforms that the new Director General of the Bangla Academy has proposed for the journal represent an acknowledgment of its past failures and an aspiration toward a more genuinely rigorous and original intellectual standard. Whether these reforms will be implemented and sustained in the face of the institutional pressures that have historically constrained the journal's quality remains to be seen, but the reform aspiration itself reflects an awareness within the institution of the gap between its mission and its achievements that the tradition has consistently identified and criticized.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SIX: CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS, INTELLECTUAL NETWORKS, AND THE SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE TRADITION

The Ahmed Sofa Rashtra Sabha, the Center for Asian Arts and Cultures, and the Organized Life of Ideas

76.1 The Ahmed Sofa Rashtra Sabha and Its Significance

The Ahmed Sofa Rashtra Sabha, the organization that has been established to continue and extend the intellectual and cultural legacy of Ahmed Sofa, represents one of the most significant institutional expressions of the tradition's organizational life. Salimullah Khan is associated with the organization, which reflects its character as the primary institutional vehicle for the continuation of the specifically Sofaite dimension of the tradition: the dimension associated with Ahmed Sofa's particular combination of literary achievement, cultural criticism, and political engagement.

The Rashtra Sabha, whose name translates roughly as the State Assembly or the National Assembly, signals through its very name the political dimension of Sofa's intellectual project: the conviction that intellectual work is always political work, that the intellectual's engagement with questions of language, culture, and identity is always simultaneously an engagement with the conditions of national political life. The organization's programs and activities, which include lectures, discussions, publications, and cultural events organized around Sofa's intellectual legacy, represent an attempt to maintain the specific character of Sofa's intellectual contribution as a living intellectual resource for the current generation of Bangladeshi thinkers rather than allowing it to be reduced to an object of retrospective academic study.

The relationship between the Ahmed Sofa Rashtra Sabha and the broader political and cultural organizations of contemporary Bangladesh is itself revealing of the tradition's specific institutional position. The organization is not affiliated with any of the major political parties, maintaining the independence from partisan politics that has been characteristic of the tradition throughout its development. But it is also not merely an academic organization in the narrow sense: it is explicitly committed to the engagement of intellectual work with political life, and its programs consistently address the specific political questions of the contemporary Bangladeshi

moment, from the post-2024 political transition to the ongoing debates about constitutional reform and the relationship between Islamic identity and democratic governance.

76.2 The Center for Asian Arts and Cultures

Salimullah Khan's association with the Center for Asian Arts and Cultures represents another dimension of the tradition's institutional life: its engagement with the regional and international dimensions of intellectual and cultural exchange that go beyond the specifically national concerns of the Ahmed Sofa Rashtra Sabha and the other primarily Bangladesh-focused institutions with which the tradition is associated.

The center's focus on Asian arts and cultures reflects the tradition's broader intellectual orientation toward the regional and international dimensions of the questions it engages with: the recognition that the questions of postcolonial identity, cultural decolonization, and democratic governance that the tradition addresses are not merely Bangladeshi questions but South Asian questions and indeed Asian questions, and that genuine engagement with these questions requires dialogue with the intellectual traditions of other Asian societies that are engaged with similar challenges.

This regional orientation is particularly significant in the current political moment, as Bangladesh navigates complex and sometimes contentious relationships with its neighbors, particularly India, and as the broader Asian regional order is transformed by the rising power of China and the specific forms of geopolitical competition between major powers that this transformation is generating. The tradition's engagement with the regional intellectual and cultural landscape through institutions like the Center for Asian Arts and Cultures represents an attempt to situate Bangladesh's specific intellectual and political challenges within the broader context of Asian modernity, and to develop through that situated engagement a form of intellectual work that is simultaneously rooted in the specific conditions of Bangladeshi life and capable of contributing to the broader regional and global conversation.

76.3 Intellectual Networks and the Social Infrastructure of the Tradition

Beyond the formal organizational structures of the Ahmed Sofa Rashtra Sabha and the Center for Asian Arts and Cultures, the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has been sustained by a dense network of informal intellectual relationships, intellectual friendship and mentorship, and the specific social practices of intellectual exchange that have characterized the tradition's development across three generations.

These informal networks are in many respects more important to the tradition's intellectual vitality than its formal organizational expressions. The specific character of Abdur Razzaq's intellectual contribution, as we have seen, was essentially social and oral: it depended on the specific social world of intellectual conversation and dialogue that his position at the University of Dhaka and his personal reputation made possible. The transmission of Razzaq's intellectual legacy to Ahmed Sofa was a social event as much as an intellectual one: it depended on the specific relationship between teacher and student that developed through years of personal engagement, argument, and mutual intellectual formation. And the transmission of the tradition

to Salimullah Khan was mediated by his personal relationship with Ahmed Sofa, who introduced him to Razzaq and provided him with the social and intellectual context within which his own intellectual formation proceeded.

The importance of these personal and social dimensions of the tradition's development raises important questions about its future: about how the intellectual legacy of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan will be transmitted to the next generation of Bangladeshi thinkers, and about what institutional forms are adequate to the kind of transmission that the tradition requires. The formal institutions of academic education, publishing, and cultural organization are necessary but not sufficient: what the tradition requires is also the kind of sustained personal intellectual engagement, the relationship of genuine mentorship and intellectual friendship, that has been at the heart of its development from the beginning. Whether and in what form the current generation of Bangladeshi thinkers associated with the tradition can sustain and develop these social dimensions of intellectual life in the specific conditions of 2026 is one of the most important questions facing the tradition's future development.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SEVEN: THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TRADITION

Social Media, Online Platforms, and the Changing Conditions of Intellectual Exchange

77.1 The Digital Revolution and Bengali Intellectual Life

The digital revolution has transformed the conditions of intellectual production and reception in Bangladesh in ways that are both enabling and potentially destructive of the conditions that genuine intellectual work requires. The proliferation of online platforms, social media, and digital media has created an unprecedented expansion of the spaces available for intellectual expression and debate, making it possible for thinkers to reach audiences that the print-based intellectual culture of the preceding period could never have reached. At the same time, the specific dynamics of the digital attention economy, with its pressure toward the brief and the immediately engaging, its algorithmic amplification of emotion over reason and outrage over analysis, and its tendency to create filter bubbles and echo chambers rather than the genuine dialogue that intellectual development requires, create conditions that are in some important respects less favorable to the kind of sustained and rigorous intellectual engagement that the tradition represents than the print-based culture it is displacing.

The specific implications of the digital transformation for the tradition's three major figures have been very different. Abdur Razzaq, who died in 1999, was untouched by the digital revolution in his intellectual life, and his oral philosophical practice, with its roots in the specific social world of personal intellectual engagement, belongs entirely to the pre-digital intellectual culture. Ahmed Sofa also died before the full impact of the digital revolution had been felt, though his later years overlapped with the beginnings of the internet era in Bangladesh. Salimullah Khan has been the figure most directly shaped by and engaged with the digital transformation: he is a regular presence on YouTube, where recordings of his lectures and interviews have accumulated

a large following, and he engages regularly with digital media as both a producer and a consumer of intellectual content.

77.2 YouTube, Online Lectures, and the Democratization of the Tradition

The specific medium of YouTube lectures and online talks has been particularly significant for the tradition's reach in the digital era. Khan's lectures and interviews on YouTube have attracted enormous audiences by the standards of Bengali-language intellectual content: hundreds of thousands of views for his most popular talks, with a particularly strong following among young people who engage with his work through online platforms rather than through the print media that was the primary vehicle of intellectual dissemination in the preceding era.

This digital reach represents a form of democratization of the tradition's intellectual influence that has genuine significance. The tradition's aspiration to contribute to the development of a genuinely critical intellectual culture in Bangladesh has always implied reaching beyond the limited audience of the educated elite who are the primary consumers of print-based intellectual culture. The digital platforms, and particularly YouTube, have created a form of access to serious intellectual content that is not mediated by the social hierarchies of the print-based intellectual world: anyone with a smartphone and an internet connection can watch and listen to Khan's lectures on Lacan, on Fanon, on the history of Bengali literature, on the political conditions of contemporary Bangladesh, without needing to navigate the social world of universities, bookshops, and intellectual networks that the print-based intellectual culture requires.

This democratization is not without its complications. The format of the YouTube lecture is not identical to the format of the sustained intellectual argument developed across the pages of a book or a journal article, and the conditions of attention and engagement that the two formats create are significantly different. The online viewer who watches a forty-minute lecture on their smartphone is not necessarily developing the capacity for the sustained engagement with complex ideas that the tradition's most demanding work requires, and the popularity of the online lecture format does not necessarily translate into the development of the critical intellectual culture that the tradition aspires to create. But the reach is real, and the engagement of younger Bangladeshis with the tradition's intellectual concerns through digital media represents a significant extension of the tradition's influence beyond the boundaries of its traditional audience.

77.3 Social Media, Political Polarization, and the Intellectual's Challenge

The social media landscape of Bangladesh in 2026 is characterized by the same dynamics of political polarization, misinformation, and algorithmic amplification of emotional content over substantive analysis that have characterized social media landscapes across the world. The specific dynamics of Bangladeshi political culture, with its deep partisan divisions, its culture of political patronage and personal loyalty, and its tendency toward zero-sum conflict between competing political formations, have been both reflected in and intensified by the social media landscape, creating conditions in which the kind of politically independent, analytically rigorous intellectual work that the tradition represents is particularly difficult to sustain.

Salimullah Khan's navigation of the social media landscape reveals the specific challenges that the digital transformation poses for the tradition's intellectual and political commitments. Khan is a regular presence on social media, particularly on Facebook, where he has a large following and where his political and intellectual interventions generate significant engagement. The format of social media does not always serve his most complex intellectual arguments well: the pressure toward brevity and the dynamics of the social media attention economy tend to amplify his most declarative and most politically charged statements at the expense of the nuanced analytical arguments that his most serious intellectual work develops. The result is a form of public intellectual presence that is more visible and more widely distributed than anything possible in the pre-digital era, but that is also subject to forms of misrepresentation, selective quotation, and political instrumentalization that the print-based intellectual culture was somewhat better equipped to resist.

The tradition's response to the challenges of the digital information environment has been characteristic of its broader approach to institutional engagement: critical participation rather than either pure opposition or uncritical adoption. Khan uses digital platforms as vehicles for intellectual dissemination while simultaneously maintaining the more sustained forms of intellectual engagement, including books, lectures, and academic teaching, that the digital platforms cannot replace. He engages with the social media landscape as a political and intellectual actor while also consistently identifying the ways in which the specific dynamics of that landscape distort and constrain the conditions of genuine intellectual exchange. This combination of engagement and critique is precisely the approach the tradition has consistently modeled in relation to the various institutional landscapes within which it has operated.

77.4 The Digital Archive and the Future of the Tradition's Textual Legacy

One of the most significant implications of the digital transformation for the tradition's future is the possibility of creating comprehensive digital archives of the tradition's textual legacy, including not only the published works of its major figures but also the recorded lectures, conversations, and interviews that represent important but previously ephemeral dimensions of the tradition's intellectual work.

For Abdur Razzaq's legacy in particular, the digital archive represents a genuinely transformative possibility. Razzaq's intellectual contribution was primarily oral, and the primary vehicles for the transmission of his thinking were the memories and published works of his students and interlocutors. The project of creating a comprehensive digital archive of the recorded conversations, lectures, and testimonies that document Razzaq's intellectual practice would represent a significant scholarly contribution to the preservation and dissemination of his intellectual legacy.

The Bangla Academy's initiative to digitize its manuscript collections, announced in 2025, represents a significant step toward the broader project of creating a digital archive of Bangladeshi intellectual and cultural heritage. All manuscripts will be digitized there, with arrangements also being made to preserve new versions, and from the digital archive five thousand pages of transliteration and five large-scale edited books will be published. [Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha](#) This initiative, if extended to include the recorded legacy of the tradition's

major figures, could make an important contribution to the preservation and dissemination of the tradition's intellectual work.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-EIGHT: POLITICAL FORMATIONS AND THE TRADITION'S ENGAGEMENT WITH ORGANIZED POLITICS

Student Politics, Left Organizations, and the Complex Relationship Between Intellectual Independence and Political Commitment

78.1 The Student Movement of 2024 and Its Intellectual Dimensions

The student movement of 2024 that brought down the Hasina government represents the most significant political event in Bangladesh since the Liberation War, and its relationship to the intellectual tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is complex and revealing. The movement, organized primarily around the demand for reform of the quota system for government employment, rapidly developed into a broader challenge to the Hasina government's authoritarian practices, and its successful overthrow of a government that had governed Bangladesh for fifteen years represents a remarkable demonstration of the political capacity of a generation of Bangladeshis who had come of age entirely within the conditions of that government's rule.

The intellectual dimensions of the student movement are directly relevant to the tradition's project. The movement was not led by any of the existing political parties or organized left formations: it was a genuinely autonomous movement that developed its own political consciousness, its own organizational forms, and its own political demands through the specific conditions of its emergence. The specific issues that animated the movement, the quota system's implications for meritocracy and fairness, the Chhatra League's control over university life, the broader patterns of authoritarian governance and corruption that the Hasina government embodied, all connect directly to concerns that the tradition has been raising for decades.

Salimullah Khan had been one of the most prominent intellectual critics of the Hasina government's authoritarian tendencies, and his critique of the dynastic politics of the Awami League, his analysis of the ways in which the government had corrupted the institutions of democratic governance in the name of development and stability, and his insistence on the importance of genuine democratic accountability as a condition of genuine political legitimacy, all found vindication of a kind in the student movement's successful challenge to the government. But the movement also raised new questions about the tradition's political analysis: if the Hasina government could be overthrown by a student movement without the direct involvement of the organized left, what does this suggest about the relationship between the tradition's intellectual critique and the actual mechanisms of political change?

78.2 The Post-2024 Political Landscape and the Tradition's Positioning

The post-2024 political landscape of Bangladesh is one of extraordinary complexity and uncertainty. The interim government led by Professor Muhammad Yunus represents a form of technocratic leadership that is associated with the tradition of development economics and civil society activism that has been one of the distinctive features of Bangladeshi public life, but that is distinct from the specifically political intellectual tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan. The specific political formations that have emerged or re-emerged in the post-2024 landscape, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, various Islamist formations, and new political movements associated with the student uprising, have complex and not always straightforward relationships to the tradition's intellectual commitments.

The Bangladesh Future Forum 2026, a significant gathering of Bangladeshi intellectuals and policy practitioners, included Salimullah Khan among its speakers, alongside figures from development economics, governance research, human rights, and various other fields, [Bangladeshfutureforum](#) suggesting that the tradition's intellectual contributions are recognized as relevant to the specific policy and political challenges of the post-2024 moment even by audiences whose intellectual formation is quite different from the tradition's specifically philosophical and literary orientation.

The specific political challenges of the post-2024 moment, including the constitutional reform agenda, the electoral system reform, the institutional reforms of the university system and the civil service, and the broader project of building a genuinely democratic political culture after decades of competitive authoritarianism, all engage directly with concerns that the tradition has consistently analyzed. The tradition's contribution to these challenges is primarily intellectual: it provides analytical frameworks for understanding the structural conditions that have produced the political failures of the postcolonial period, historical perspective on the recurring patterns of political development in Bangladesh, and normative guidance grounded in the values of equality, human dignity, and democratic governance that the tradition has consistently affirmed.

78.3 The Organized Left and the Tradition's Complex Relationship to Its Historical Formations

The organized left in Bangladesh, in its various fractured and fragmented forms, has had a complex and sometimes contentious relationship with the tradition throughout its development. The tradition has consistently maintained its intellectual independence from the specific organizational formations of the left while sharing many of the left's normative commitments and analytical concerns. This combination of shared commitments and institutional independence has made the tradition both a fellow traveler and a critic of the organized left: a voice that speaks from within the broader tradition of left political thought while refusing to subordinate its intellectual independence to the requirements of any specific organizational formation.

The specific history of this relationship is marked by the same patterns of intellectual engagement and political disagreement that have characterized the tradition's relationship to other political formations. Salimullah Khan's support for the Shahbagh Movement in 2013, his critique of Farhad Mazhar's political positions over the years, and his navigation of the complex alignments of the post-2024 political landscape all reflect a political practice that is consistent with the tradition's broader approach to political engagement: the willingness to support specific

political positions and specific movements when they are consistent with the tradition's normative commitments, combined with the insistence on maintaining the intellectual independence that allows the tradition to critique those same positions and movements when they fall short of their own aspirations or when they accommodate forms of power that contradict their stated values.

78.4 The Jamaat Question and the Tradition's Structural Critique

The question of Jamaat-e-Islami and its relationship to democratic politics in Bangladesh is perhaps the most significant and most contentious political question that the tradition has engaged with in the post-2024 period, and its engagement with this question illustrates both the strengths and the limitations of the tradition's analytical framework as applied to the specific political conditions of the current moment.

As we have seen in earlier chapters, Khan's position on Jamaat, that the organization should not be trusted even if it adopts secularist positions because it has always been on the wrong side and because its roots are in a violent ideal, is a structural critique rather than a merely historical one. It is not simply the argument that Jamaat collaborated with Pakistani forces in 1971 and therefore cannot be trusted, though that historical argument is also part of the tradition's critique. It is the deeper argument that Jamaat's structural orientation, its understanding of politics as the implementation of a specific interpretation of Islamic law rather than as the expression of genuine popular democratic will, makes it fundamentally incompatible with the democratic values that the tradition affirms.

This structural critique is important and substantive, but it also raises difficult questions about the tradition's approach to political pluralism. If Jamaat, or any other political formation, is structurally incompatible with democratic values, what should be the response of a democratic political order to its participation in that order? The tradition does not endorse the kind of extra-legal exclusion of Islamist political formations that was practiced by the Hasina government, which used the legal system as an instrument of political persecution against Jamaat and the BNP. But it also does not simply affirm the right of all political formations, regardless of their internal structure and their stated goals, to participate in democratic politics. The tradition's framework for thinking about this question is more sophisticated than either of these extreme positions, but it has not always been articulated with the clarity and consistency that the political stakes of the question demand.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-NINE: THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPE AND THE TRADITION'S GLOBAL POSITIONING

Diaspora Networks, Foreign Universities, and the Politics of International Recognition

79.1 The Bangladeshi Diaspora and the Tradition's Global Audience

The Bangladeshi diaspora, spread across the United Kingdom, the United States, the Gulf States, and other destinations, represents both an extended audience for the tradition's intellectual work and a specific institutional context that has shaped the international dimensions of the tradition's reception and influence. The diaspora communities in the United Kingdom and the United States have maintained significant connections with Bangladeshi intellectual and cultural life, supporting publishers, cultural organizations, and intellectual events that have provided the tradition with a form of international institutional presence.

The specific dynamics of the Bangladeshi diaspora's relationship to intellectual and cultural life in Bangladesh are complex. The diaspora has been a significant source of financial support for Bangladeshi cultural production, including publishing, music, and the arts, and has maintained connections with the intellectual debates of Bangladesh through online platforms and periodic visits. But the diaspora's relationship to the specific intellectual concerns of the tradition, including the politics of the Bengali language, the specific dimensions of Bangladeshi political development, and the specific forms of Sufi spirituality and syncretic culture that the tradition defends, is mediated by the specific conditions of diasporic existence: the conditions of cultural preservation in the context of migration, the specific generational differences between first-generation immigrants who maintain strong connections to Bangladeshi cultural life and their children who are more fully integrated into the cultural life of the host country, and the specific political dynamics of diaspora communities that are often more polarized along ethnic and religious lines than the populations of the home country.

The tradition's international presence, beyond the diaspora, has been largely limited by the structural condition that characterizes all non-metropolitan intellectual traditions: the fact that serious intellectual work conducted in languages other than the major metropolitan languages is systematically invisible to the institutions and audiences of the global knowledge economy. The tradition's major works have not been translated into English or other major international languages, and its intellectual contributions are therefore unknown to the vast majority of scholars and intellectuals who work on questions directly relevant to its concerns: the question of postcolonial modernity, the relationship between Islam and democracy, the politics of language and cultural decolonization, and the specific history and political development of South Asia.

79.2 International Academic Institutions and the Politics of Recognition

The specific dynamics of the relationship between the Bangladeshi tradition and the international academic institutions that are the primary gatekeepers of global intellectual recognition deserve careful analysis. The tradition's work has been substantially ignored by the major international academic centers that work on South Asian studies, postcolonial theory, and Islamic political thought, not because it is intellectually inferior to the work that these centers recognize and promote, but because the specific conditions of the global knowledge economy systematically disadvantage intellectual work that is conducted in non-metropolitan languages and in institutions that lack the prestige and the global networks of the major research universities.

This situation is in some respects changing. The increasing availability of online translations and the growing interest in non-Western intellectual traditions within certain segments of the global academy have created some new openings for the tradition's international engagement. Khan's

active presence on social media and online platforms has given him a degree of international visibility that was not available to his predecessors, and the increasing global attention to questions of postcolonial modernity, decoloniality, and the relationship between Islamic identity and democratic politics has created intellectual contexts in which the tradition's specific contributions are more visible and more relevant than they were in the earlier period of the tradition's development.

But the fundamental structural condition remains: as long as the global knowledge economy continues to operate on the assumption that serious intellectual work is conducted in English and in the institutions of the global North, the tradition's most important intellectual contributions will remain largely invisible to the international audience they deserve to reach. The tradition's own analysis of this condition, its critique of the colonial epistemological hierarchy that marginalizes non-metropolitan intellectual work, is itself the most powerful argument for changing the structural conditions that create the marginalization it analyzes.

79.3 The India-Bangladesh Intellectual Relationship and Its Complications

The relationship between the Bangladeshi intellectual tradition and the broader Bengali intellectual tradition of West Bengal in India is one of the most significant and most complicated dimensions of the tradition's international positioning. The Bengali intellectual tradition of West Bengal, centered primarily but not exclusively on Calcutta, is both the tradition within which the Bangladeshi tradition has its deepest roots and a tradition from which the Bangladeshi tradition has felt the need to differentiate itself in ways that are sometimes productive and sometimes simply defensive.

The complications of this relationship derive from several sources. The political dynamics of the India-Bangladesh relationship, including the specific forms of Indian cultural, economic, and political influence over Bangladesh that the tradition has analyzed and criticized, inevitably shape the intellectual relationship between Bangladeshi and West Bengali thinkers in ways that go beyond purely intellectual considerations. The specific cultural politics of Bengal, including the debates about the relationship between the Hindu and Muslim dimensions of Bengali culture and the specific question of whose Bengali is the standard, also shape the intellectual relationship in ways that are difficult to navigate with purely intellectual criteria.

Salimullah Khan's claim, advanced in December 2024, that India seeks to maintain Bangladesh in a position of colonial dependency, represents the most direct and most controversial expression of the tradition's analysis of the India-Bangladesh relationship, and it has generated significant controversy both within Bangladesh and in India. The claim connects to a broader pattern in the tradition's analysis of Bangladesh's international position: the argument that Bangladesh's formal political independence has not been accompanied by genuine economic and political independence from its neighbors, and that the specific dynamics of Indian influence over Bangladesh, while less violent than the Pakistani domination against which the liberation struggle was fought, represent a continuation of the structural conditions of dependency that genuine independence requires overcoming.

The intellectual relationship with West Bengali scholars is complicated by this political context but is not reducible to it. There are significant intellectual affinities between the Bangladeshi tradition and certain strands of the West Bengali intellectual tradition, particularly in the areas of literary criticism, historical scholarship, and political philosophy. But these affinities are often obscured by the political tensions between the two countries and by the specific cultural politics of Bengali identity that make straightforward intellectual exchange difficult to sustain.

CHAPTER EIGHTY: THE TRADITION IN 2026: INSTITUTIONAL STOCK-TAKING AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

A Critical Assessment of the Tradition's Current Institutional Position and Its Prospects for Development

80.1 The Institutional Achievements of Seven Decades

Taking stock of the tradition's institutional achievements across seven decades requires acknowledging both what has been accomplished and what the specific institutional conditions of Bangladeshi intellectual life have prevented from being accomplished. The achievements are genuine and significant. The tradition has sustained a form of critical independent intellectual engagement with the fundamental questions of Bangladeshi life, including questions of political development, cultural identity, language and education, Islamic tradition and democratic governance, and the legacies of colonialism and the liberation struggle, across seven decades of political instability, institutional disruption, and the specific pressures of operating in a society where intellectual independence is systematically penalized and political conformity systematically rewarded.

The tradition has produced a body of intellectual work that, while primarily oral and print-based in its primary forms of expression, represents the most sustained and most rigorous attempt in the history of Bangladesh to think through the fundamental conditions and possibilities of Bangladeshi life. The specific achievements of each of the tradition's three major figures, Razzaq's Socratic oral philosophy, Sofa's prophetic literary and cultural criticism, and Khan's systematic theoretical synthesis, collectively constitute an intellectual legacy of genuine significance that deserves far wider recognition than it has received.

The tradition has also maintained, against considerable pressure and temptation, its intellectual independence from the partisan political formations that have dominated Bangladeshi political life. This independence has been a source of both the tradition's intellectual integrity and its political marginalization: a thinker who refuses to affiliate with any of the major political formations is less likely to receive the institutional recognition and the political influence that affiliation with a powerful formation can provide. But it is also the condition of the tradition's capacity to provide the kind of genuinely critical analysis of Bangladeshi political life that serves the public interest rather than any particular partisan interest.

80.2 The Institutional Gaps and Challenges

The tradition's institutional achievements must be balanced against an honest acknowledgment of the institutional gaps and challenges that have prevented the tradition from having the full influence that its intellectual significance would warrant. The most significant of these gaps is the absence of a genuinely independent institutional base for the tradition's development: a research center, a journal, or a publishing program that is specifically dedicated to developing and disseminating the tradition's intellectual framework without the constraints imposed by dependence on the state institutions, the private universities, or the commercial publishing industry.

The absence of such an independent institutional base reflects the broader institutional conditions of Bangladeshi intellectual life: the weakness of the philanthropic and civil society institutions that would provide the financial support for genuinely independent intellectual institutions, the dominance of the state and the market as the primary patrons of intellectual work, and the specific political dynamics that make genuinely independent intellectual institutions difficult to establish and sustain in a political culture characterized by partisanship and patronage.

A second significant institutional gap is the tradition's limited engagement with the international academy: its failure, partly through the structural conditions of the global knowledge economy and partly through the specific conditions of its own development, to build the kinds of international intellectual networks that would allow its insights to reach the global audiences they deserve. The tradition's work on the relationship between Islamic identity and democratic governance, on the politics of language and cultural decolonization, and on the specific conditions of postcolonial political development in South Asia, is directly relevant to some of the most important intellectual debates of the current moment, and its failure to reach the scholars and intellectuals engaged in those debates represents a significant loss both for the tradition and for the global intellectual community.

80.3 The Specific Institutional Opportunities of the Post-2024 Moment

The political transformation of 2024 has created specific institutional opportunities for the tradition's development that did not exist under the Hasina government. The delegitimation of the specific forms of institutional capture that characterized the preceding period, the reform of the governance structures of the university system and the cultural institutions, and the broader opening of political space for genuine intellectual pluralism all create conditions in which the tradition's specific contribution is more likely to be recognized and more capable of being developed than it was in the immediately preceding period.

The specific institutional opportunities include the possibility of genuine reform of the university system in directions consistent with the tradition's analysis of what genuine intellectual development requires: the liberation of academic appointments and academic culture from partisan political control, the development of genuine meritocratic standards for academic recognition, and the creation of institutional spaces within the university system that are genuinely committed to the kind of rigorous and independent intellectual engagement that the tradition has always modeled. If public university governance is rebuilt around research standards, transparent evaluation, competitive incentives, structured return pathways, and strategic integration of new technologies, Bangladesh can alter its intellectual and economic

trajectory within a decade, [The Financial Express](#) a claim that, while framed in the language of development economics, reflects the same underlying aspiration for institutional quality and genuine intellectual development that the tradition has consistently expressed in its own philosophical and cultural register.

The reform of the Bangla Academy under new leadership represents a second institutional opportunity, one that is directly relevant to the tradition's specific concerns about the quality of Bengali-language intellectual production and the adequacy of the institutional support for that production. Whether the reform aspiration of the new leadership will be sustained and whether it will be adequate to the scale of the institutional challenges the academy faces are questions that cannot be answered with confidence, but the aspiration itself represents a genuine alignment between the institution's stated direction and the tradition's intellectual concerns.

The expansion of the digital media landscape, for all its challenges, also represents a genuine institutional opportunity for the tradition's development. The possibility of creating genuinely comprehensive digital archives of the tradition's textual and oral legacy, the ability to reach audiences that were previously inaccessible through print-based media, and the potential for building international intellectual networks through online platforms all represent opportunities that the tradition has only begun to exploit and that its future development could use more fully.

80.4 The Tradition's Most Urgent Institutional Needs

Drawing together the analysis of Part Eight, it is possible to identify the tradition's most urgent institutional needs as it moves into the second quarter of the twenty-first century. These needs are both specific and general: specific in that they refer to the particular institutional conditions of Bangladeshi intellectual life, and general in that they connect to the broader question of what the institutional conditions of genuine intellectual development look like in a postcolonial society navigating the complex challenges of the current historical moment.

The first and most urgent institutional need is the development of a genuinely independent institutional base for the tradition: a research center, a graduate program, or a journal that is specifically committed to the development and dissemination of the kind of critical, historically grounded, and theoretically rigorous intellectual work that the tradition represents, and that is insulated from both the political pressures of the partisan political culture and the market pressures of the commercial publishing industry. The creation of such an institution would represent the most significant single contribution to the tradition's future development that the current moment could produce.

The second institutional need is the development of a systematic program for the translation and international dissemination of the tradition's most important works. The translation of key texts by Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan into English and other major international languages would represent a significant contribution both to the tradition's international visibility and to the global intellectual conversations about postcolonial modernity, Islamic democracy, and cultural decolonization to which the tradition's work is directly relevant.

The third institutional need is the development of a comprehensive digital archive of the tradition's oral and textual legacy: the recorded lectures and conversations that document Razzaq's Socratic philosophical practice, the full corpus of Sofa's published and unpublished writings, and the systematic documentation of Khan's extensive body of published and broadcast intellectual work. Such an archive would not only preserve the tradition's legacy for future generations but would make it accessible in forms that the print-based intellectual culture of the preceding period could not provide.

The fourth institutional need is the development of genuine pedagogical materials, in Bengali and adapted to the specific conditions of Bangladeshi education at all levels, that make the tradition's intellectual insights accessible to students across the full range of the Bangladeshi educational system, not only in the elite universities where the tradition has had its primary audience but in the secondary schools and community colleges where the conditions of genuine democratic intellectual culture must ultimately be developed if the tradition's aspirations for Bangladeshi society are to be realized.

SUMMARY OF PART EIGHT

Part Eight has conducted a systematic examination of the institutional dimensions of the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, tracing the specific ways in which the institutional landscape of Bangladeshi intellectual and cultural life has both enabled and constrained the tradition's development across seven decades.

The analysis examined the University of Dhaka as the primary institutional home of the tradition's foundational figure, tracing both the specific conditions of intellectual life within the university that made Razzaq's Socratic oral philosophical practice possible and the process of political colonization that has progressively damaged the university's intellectual culture. It examined the private university sector, and particularly North South University, as the contemporary institutional home of the tradition's living representative, tracing the specific institutional tensions that arise from conducting an intellectual project committed to Bengali-medium education and cultural decolonization within an English-medium private university whose educational model embodies the very colonial epistemological hierarchy the tradition critiques.

The analysis examined the Bangla Academy as the state's primary institutional expression of its commitment to Bengali language and culture, tracing its founding aspirations, its institutional compromises, and the specific criticisms the tradition has consistently directed at its failure to fulfill its potential, as well as the post-2024 reform initiatives under new leadership that represent a genuine opening for a more adequate institutional engagement with the tradition's concerns. It examined the publishing industry and the Ekushey Book Fair as the material conditions of intellectual production and dissemination, tracing the specific structural constraints that the industry's limited scale and commercial dynamics impose on intellectual work, while also acknowledging the genuine cultural vitality that the book fair represents.

The analysis examined the cultural organizations associated with the tradition, particularly the Ahmed Sofa Rashtra Sabha, as vehicles for the continuation and development of the tradition's intellectual legacy, and traced the broader network of informal intellectual relationships that have been as important as any formal institutional structure in sustaining the tradition's vitality. It examined the digital transformation as a new institutional landscape that presents both opportunities and challenges for the tradition's development, and assessed the specific ways in which the tradition has engaged with and navigated this transformation.

The analysis examined the tradition's relationships with organized politics, including the student movement of 2024, the organized left, and the specific question of Jamaat-e-Islami and political Islam, tracing the tradition's characteristic combination of intellectual independence and political engagement. It examined the tradition's international institutional positioning, including its relationship to the Bangladeshi diaspora, the global knowledge economy, and the specific complications of the India-Bangladesh intellectual relationship.

The concluding chapter drew together the analysis to offer a critical stock-taking of the tradition's current institutional position, identifying both its genuine achievements and its significant institutional gaps, and proposing a set of institutional needs whose fulfillment would be the most significant contribution the current political and institutional moment could make to the tradition's continued development.

The central conclusion of Part Eight is that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has survived and developed despite, rather than because of, the specific institutional conditions of Bangladeshi intellectual life, and that the development of institutional conditions genuinely adequate to the tradition's intellectual ambitions remains one of the most urgent tasks facing Bangladeshi cultural and intellectual policy in 2026. The tradition's intellectual achievements are genuine and significant; the institutional infrastructure adequate to their full development and dissemination remains to be built.

Part Nine will address the pedagogical dimensions of the tradition: the specific ways in which the tradition's intellectual insights can be developed into a pedagogy adequate to the conditions of Bangladeshi education at all levels, and the specific contributions that the tradition can make to the reform of Bangladesh's educational system that the post-2024 moment has made both more possible and more urgently necessary.

End of Part Eight

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PART NINE: PEDAGOGY, EMANCIPATION, AND THE EDUCATION OF A NATION

Teaching the Tradition, Reforming the System, and the Classroom as Site of Liberation

PREFATORY NOTE TO PART NINE

Part Eight concluded with the observation that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has survived and developed despite, rather than because of, the specific institutional conditions of Bangladeshi intellectual life. It identified the development of a genuinely independent institutional base, a comprehensive digital archive, a systematic translation program, and genuine pedagogical materials as the four most urgent institutional needs of the tradition as it moves into the second quarter of the twenty-first century. Part Nine now addresses the last and in many ways the most consequential of these needs in sustained and systematic detail.

Pedagogy is the art and science of teaching. It is also, when practiced with sufficient seriousness and self-consciousness, a form of philosophy: a set of claims about what human beings are, what they are capable of becoming, how they learn, what they need to learn, and what the relationship between teacher and student ought to be. Every pedagogical practice embeds, whether explicitly or implicitly, a set of philosophical commitments about knowledge, power, identity, and human dignity. The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan makes these commitments unusually explicit, and in doing so, offers a remarkably coherent and historically grounded philosophy of education that is directly relevant to the conditions of Bangladeshi life in 2026.

The chapters that follow develop this claim in the following manner. Chapter Eighty-One establishes the philosophical foundations of the tradition's approach to education by examining the implicit and explicit educational philosophies that can be reconstructed from the practices and writings of all three figures. Chapter Eighty-Two examines Abdur Razzaq's practice as a pedagogue in sustained detail, arguing that his Socratic oral method represents a fully developed and philosophically defensible alternative to the transmission model of education that dominates Bangladeshi institutions. Chapter Eighty-Three examines Ahmed Sofa's engagement with education as a cultural and political question, tracing his critique of the Bangladeshi educated class and his vision of what genuine intellectual formation might look like. Chapter Eighty-Four examines Salimullah Khan's pedagogy of decolonization, the most theoretically developed educational philosophy in the tradition, and traces its theoretical sources, its practical applications, and its implications for educational reform in Bangladesh.

Chapter Eighty-Five addresses the most politically charged educational debate in contemporary Bangladesh, the question of Bengali-medium versus English-medium education, tracing the tradition's consistent and principled position on this question and evaluating it against the arguments of its critics and against the evidence of international comparative educational research. Chapter Eighty-Six offers a systematic account of how the tradition's intellectual insights might be developed into curriculum materials for different levels of the Bangladeshi educational system. Chapter Eighty-Seven examines the tradition's complex engagement with madrasa education, arguing that the tradition's approach offers important resources for

integrating madrasa education into a genuinely pluralist conception of national education. Chapter Eighty-Eight examines student movements as a form of pedagogy, arguing that the history of student activism in Bangladesh represents an important and undertheorized dimension of the tradition's educational philosophy.

Chapter Eighty-Nine addresses the specific educational implications of the 2024 political upheaval, arguing that the student-led uprising that brought down Sheikh Hasina's government was not merely a political event but an educational event of the first order, a demonstration at the level of practice of many of the tradition's central claims about human agency, collective learning, and the relationship between intellectual formation and political action. Chapter Ninety draws together the analysis of the entire part to offer a comprehensive account of what a genuinely emancipatory pedagogy adequate to the conditions of Bangladesh in 2026 would look like, drawing on the tradition's resources while going beyond them in directions the tradition's own internal logic demands.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-ONE: THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE TRADITION'S EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT

Knowing, Learning, and the Formation of the Human Being in Bengali Philosophical Perspective

81.1 Education as a Philosophical Problem

The question of what education is and what it ought to do is one of the oldest and most persistently contested questions in the history of human thought. In the Western philosophical tradition, it is addressed with particular force in Plato's dialogues, in Aristotle's accounts of practical wisdom and moral formation, in Rousseau's *Emile*, in Kant's writings on pedagogy, in Dewey's conception of education as experience and democracy as a way of life, and in the critical pedagogy tradition initiated by Paulo Freire and extended by a wide range of subsequent thinkers. In the South Asian philosophical tradition, it is addressed in the Vedantic conception of education as the progressive recognition of the identity of atman and Brahman, in the Buddhist conception of education as the path to enlightenment and liberation from suffering, in the Islamic conception of education as the cultivation of the knowledge necessary for righteous action in the world and submission to the divine will, and in the reformist traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that sought to engage these ancient conceptions with the challenges posed by colonialism, modernity, and the requirements of democratic self-governance.

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is situated at the intersection of these philosophical resources. It draws, consciously and selectively, on Western philosophical discussions of education, on South Asian reformist educational thought, on Islamic conceptions of knowledge and learning, and on the specific historical experience of a Bengali Muslim society that has been shaped by centuries of colonial domination and that is still, in 2026, working through the implications of that domination for the possibilities of genuine human development. What emerges from this intersection is not a simple synthesis but a productive and often tense dialogue

among different conceptions of what human beings are, what they are capable of becoming, and what conditions are necessary for that becoming.

The starting point for understanding the tradition's educational philosophy is the recognition that all three figures share a fundamental commitment to a conception of education as formation rather than transmission. Transmission, in the sense of the transfer of a body of pre-established knowledge from teacher to student, is not education in any philosophically serious sense. It is training, socialization, or what Paulo Freire famously called banking education: the depositing of information into passive receptacles in ways that reproduce existing relations of intellectual and social authority without questioning or transforming them. Formation, by contrast, is the development of the human being's capacities for thought, judgment, and autonomous engagement with the world in ways that enable genuine self-determination and genuine contribution to the common good.

This distinction between transmission and formation runs through the entire intellectual practice of all three figures, though it is expressed in characteristically different ways by each of them. Abdur Razzaq's Socratic practice is the most extreme expression of the formation model: he refused to transmit knowledge in the conventional sense at all, preferring instead to create conditions in which his interlocutors were forced to think for themselves, to question their assumptions, to follow arguments wherever they led, and to develop the kind of intellectual courage and honesty that genuine thought requires. Ahmed Sofa's practice as a writer and cultural critic is a different expression of the same commitment: he wrote not to inform but to disturb, not to provide answers but to force his readers to confront questions they had been avoiding, not to confirm existing beliefs but to challenge the comfortable confusions that pass for thought in a society that has not yet learned to think seriously about its own condition. Salimullah Khan's practice as a teacher and public intellectual combines elements of both: the theoretical rigor of Razzaq's commitment to intellectual honesty and the prophetic urgency of Sofa's commitment to naming what is wrong.

81.2 The Colonial Inheritance and its Educational Dimensions

The most important philosophical context for understanding the tradition's educational thought is the colonial inheritance and its specific educational dimensions. Colonialism was not merely a political and economic system. It was also an educational system, a system for producing subjects who would accept the legitimacy of colonial authority, who would aspire to the social positions available within the colonial hierarchy, and who would reproduce the intellectual and cultural frameworks through which colonial domination justified itself. The Macaulay Minute of 1835, which established English as the medium of instruction in Indian education and committed colonial educational policy to the production of a class of people Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect, is the most notorious single document in the history of colonial education, but it represents a general tendency that shaped educational systems across the colonized world.

The specific educational system created by the colonial power in Bengal and subsequently inherited by Bangladesh is the subject of sustained critical attention throughout the tradition. Abdur Razzaq, whose own education straddled the boundary between the colonial educational

system and the intellectual resources of Islamic and Bengali culture, was acutely aware of the ways in which that system had shaped the minds of the class it produced. His students recall him saying, in various formulations, that the English educational system had produced a generation of clerks rather than thinkers: people who were trained to administer a system they had not designed and could not fundamentally question, rather than citizens who were capable of taking genuine responsibility for the governance of their own society. This critique anticipates, and in some respects exceeds, the critique that Frantz Fanon would develop in *The Wretched of the Earth* and that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o would extend in *Decolonizing the Mind*.

Ahmed Sofa's engagement with the colonial educational inheritance is concentrated in his analysis of the Bangladeshi intellectual class, which he sees as the primary product and the primary perpetuator of the colonial educational system. In Sofa's analysis, the Bangladeshi intellectual is defined not by genuine intellectual engagement with the problems of Bangladeshi society but by the performance of intellectual credentials: the display of educational certificates, the acquisition of foreign degrees, the demonstration of familiarity with foreign thinkers and foreign frameworks, and the cultivation of social networks within the institutional structures of intellectual life. This performance is not education in any serious sense. It is the reproduction of colonial hierarchy in a new institutional form, a way of maintaining the distinctions between educated and uneducated, elite and mass, that the colonial system established and that the postcolonial system inherited without questioning.

Salimullah Khan's engagement with the colonial educational inheritance is the most theoretically developed in the tradition. Drawing on Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and the broader postcolonial critical tradition, Khan argues that the colonial educational system produced what he calls an epistemic hierarchy: a systematic ordering of forms of knowledge in which European and English-language knowledge is positioned as inherently superior to indigenous and Bengali-language knowledge, in ways that have continuing consequences for every aspect of Bangladeshi intellectual and institutional life. This epistemic hierarchy is not merely an intellectual problem. It is a political problem, because it reproduces the conditions of colonial domination even after political independence has been achieved, and it is a moral problem, because it denies the equal dignity and intellectual worth of the majority of Bangladeshi citizens whose knowledge is produced in and through Bengali rather than in and through English.

81.3 The Islamic Educational Tradition and its Complex Relationship to the Tradition's Philosophy

The three figures' relationship to the Islamic educational tradition is complex and deserves careful analysis, because it has been a source both of productive engagement and of significant misunderstanding. Bangladesh is an overwhelmingly Muslim-majority society, and the Islamic educational tradition, including both the formal madrasa system and the informal networks of religious learning and practice, has been a constitutive element of Bengali Muslim culture for centuries. To understand what education means in Bangladesh, and what educational reform requires, one must engage seriously with this tradition rather than dismissing it or marginalizing it.

Abdur Razzaq's relationship to the Islamic educational tradition was shaped by his profound knowledge of Islamic intellectual history and his critical appreciation of the forms of learning and thought that the tradition had produced. He was deeply read in classical Islamic philosophy, jurisprudence, and theology, and he understood the Islamic educational tradition as a serious intellectual achievement that had produced remarkable thinkers and remarkable institutions across many centuries. But he was also acutely aware of the ways in which that tradition had, in the specific conditions of colonized Bengal, become defensive, backward-looking, and disconnected from the intellectual challenges posed by modernity. His critique of the madrasa system was not a dismissal of Islamic learning but an argument that genuine Islamic education required engagement with the full range of human intellectual achievement, including the secular Western intellectual tradition, rather than a retreat into a defensive enclosure.

Ahmed Sofa's engagement with the Islamic educational tradition is more complicated and more controversial. Sofa came from a family background that included significant Islamic learning, and his own intellectual formation was deeply shaped by Bengali Islamic culture in ways that are not always fully appreciated by those who read him primarily as a secular critic. His critique of religious conservatism in Bangladeshi intellectual and political life was not a critique of Islam as such but a critique of the instrumentalization of Islamic symbols and practices by political and intellectual elites who used them to defend privilege and resist genuine thought. Sofa distinguished sharply between the living spiritual and intellectual tradition of Islamic learning, which he respected, and the ossified institutional forms in which that tradition had become trapped, which he subjected to sustained critical analysis.

Salimullah Khan's engagement with the Islamic educational tradition has been one of the more contested aspects of his public intellectual career. Khan has argued, drawing on his broader theoretical framework of postcolonial critique, that the systematic marginalization of the madrasa system within Bangladeshi educational policy represents a form of epistemic violence: a denial of the validity of an intellectual tradition that has been central to the formation of Bengali Muslim identity for centuries. His support in 2017 for the government's recognition of the Dawra degree awarded by Qawmi madrasas was seen by some of his critics on the secular left as a concession to political Islam that was inconsistent with his broader philosophical commitments. Khan's defense of this position, however, was not a defense of political Islam but an argument for educational pluralism and the recognition of the intellectual dignity of a tradition that the colonial and postcolonial state has consistently marginalized.

81.4 Dewey, Freire, and the International Context of the Tradition's Educational Philosophy

No account of the tradition's educational philosophy would be complete without situating it in relation to the major international traditions of educational thought with which it intersects. Two figures are particularly important for this purpose: John Dewey and Paulo Freire.

John Dewey's philosophy of education, developed in a series of major works from *The School and Society* (1899) through *Democracy and Education* (1916) and *Experience and Education* (1938), represents the most sustained and rigorous attempt in the Western philosophical tradition to ground educational theory in a comprehensive account of human experience, democratic

society, and the relationship between learning and living. Dewey argued that genuine education is inseparable from genuine experience: it is the process through which human beings develop the capacities for intelligent engagement with the problems of their lives, individually and collectively. He was sharply critical of educational systems that substitute rote learning, passive reception, and the accumulation of inert information for the active, problem-oriented, experience-based learning that genuine human development requires. He insisted that education and democracy are internally related: the kind of thoughtful, self-directing, engaged citizenry that democracy requires can only be produced by the kind of education that develops these qualities, rather than suppressing them.

The parallels between Dewey's philosophy of education and the tradition's implicit and explicit educational commitments are striking. Razzaq's Socratic practice is a form of problem-based, experience-oriented learning that resonates strongly with Dewey's emphasis on genuine inquiry as the engine of intellectual development. Sofa's insistence on the priority of genuine engagement over the performance of intellectual credentials parallels Dewey's critique of education as the transmission of inert information. Khan's emphasis on the importance of education for democratic citizenship and his critique of the colonial educational hierarchy parallel Dewey's democratic educational theory. The tradition has not typically cited Dewey explicitly, but the convergences suggest that both the tradition and Dewey are responding to similar problems in the theory and practice of education under conditions of capitalist modernity.

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) is the single most influential work of educational philosophy produced in the Global South, and it has had significant impact on educational theory and practice across the world, including in South Asia. Freire's central argument is that genuine education is a practice of freedom, a process through which oppressed people develop the critical consciousness necessary to understand their own condition and to engage in the collective action required to transform it. He distinguished sharply between banking education, which reproduces oppression by treating students as passive receptacles for knowledge deposited by teachers who represent the perspective of the dominant class, and problem-posing education, which liberates students by engaging them as active subjects in a dialogical process of critical inquiry into the conditions of their lives. He argued that the transformation of education was inseparable from the transformation of society: genuine educational reform requires and contributes to the broader transformation of the social relations of domination and oppression.

The resonances between Freire's framework and the tradition's educational philosophy are profound. Salimullah Khan has engaged with Freire explicitly and at length, drawing on his concept of conscientization to develop his own account of what genuine education requires in the postcolonial conditions of Bangladesh. Ahmed Sofa's critique of the Bangladeshi intellectual as a product and perpetuator of a system of intellectual and social domination parallels Freire's analysis of the ways in which the colonized intelligentsia internalizes the values and perspectives of the colonizer. Abdur Razzaq's Socratic practice is a form of dialogical education that resonates strongly with Freire's problem-posing model. The tradition and Freire are not identical in their analyses or prescriptions, but they share a commitment to the proposition that genuine education is a practice of freedom that requires the active, critical engagement of the learner and the transformation of the social conditions that constrain human development.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-TWO: ABDUR RAZZAQ AS PEDAGOGUE

The Socratic Method, the Art of the Question, and the Teaching That Never Published Itself

82.1 The Radical Originality of the Oral Method

Abdur Razzaq's pedagogical method was, by the standards of any educational system in any country in the twentieth century, radically original. In an institutional context defined by lectures, syllabuses, examinations, and the orderly transmission of prescribed bodies of knowledge, Razzaq simply did something else. He talked. He asked questions. He recounted stories and episodes from the intellectual history of humanity. He juxtaposed ideas and thinkers in unexpected ways. He refused to arrive at conclusions. He circled back, complicated, and deepened without ever simplifying. And in doing so, he produced an effect on his students, his colleagues, and his visitors that no amount of conventional lecturing could have produced: he made them think.

The depth of this effect is attested by the testimony of dozens of prominent Bangladeshis who encountered Razzaq at various stages of his career. Politicians, academics, writers, journalists, and public figures all describe the encounter with Razzaq as one of the formative intellectual experiences of their lives. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was a student at the University of Dhaka when Razzaq was already teaching there, is reported to have described Razzaq's influence on his political thinking as profound and irreplaceable. Ahmad Sharif, one of the most important literary scholars in the history of Bangladesh, maintained a lifelong intellectual relationship with Razzaq that shaped the development of his critical practice. Kamal Hossain, the constitutional lawyer who played a central role in the drafting of Bangladesh's constitution, was deeply influenced by Razzaq's political and constitutional thinking. And Ahmed Sofa, whose own intellectual originality was extraordinary, consistently acknowledged Razzaq as his most important intellectual formation.

What was it about Razzaq's method that produced these effects? The answer requires some attention to the specific mechanics of his pedagogical practice, which was anything but random or undirected, even if it appeared so from the outside. Razzaq's apparently casual conversations were in fact highly disciplined intellectual exercises in which he used a specific set of techniques to force his interlocutors into genuine engagement with difficult questions. He asked questions that had no easy answers and refused to accept easy answers when they were offered. He introduced unexpected comparisons: between Bengali political figures and European philosophical traditions, between Islamic jurisprudential debates and contemporary political controversies, between economic structures and cultural patterns, in ways that forced his interlocutors to expand their conceptual frameworks and abandon the comfortable simplicities of their habitual thinking. He used self-deprecation and apparent uncertainty not as evasions but as provocations: by presenting himself as someone still working out his own understanding of difficult questions, he created space in which his interlocutors felt entitled to think for themselves rather than simply defer to authoritative pronouncements.

82.2 The Question as Pedagogical Instrument

The central instrument of Razzaq's pedagogical practice was the question. Not the rhetorical question, which is really a disguised assertion, and not the examination question, which tests whether the student has mastered a predetermined body of knowledge, but the genuine philosophical question, which opens rather than closes intellectual space and which the questioner does not know the answer to, or knows the answer to only in part and wishes to deepen through the process of dialogical inquiry.

This distinction between types of questions is philosophically crucial and pedagogically decisive. The examination question, which is the dominant form of question in every educational system that has been shaped by the colonial inheritance, is an instrument of power as much as of knowledge: it enforces the authority of the teacher, the curriculum, and the institutional structure of education by creating a situation in which the student's task is not to think but to demonstrate that they have successfully absorbed what they have been told. The genuine philosophical question, by contrast, is an instrument of liberation: it creates a situation in which both teacher and student are genuinely uncertain and in which the only way forward is through collaborative, committed intellectual engagement.

Razzaq's use of the genuine philosophical question was not merely a pedagogical technique. It was a philosophical commitment and a political position. By refusing to play the role of the authoritative transmitter of established knowledge, he was refusing to reproduce the colonial educational hierarchy in his own teaching practice. By insisting on genuine inquiry as the mode of intellectual engagement, he was modeling the kind of democratic intellectual culture that he believed Bangladesh needed and that its colonial inheritance had consistently suppressed. By treating his students and interlocutors as genuine intellectual equals, capable of contributing to the process of understanding rather than merely receiving its results, he was instantiating in practice the democratic values that formed the core of his political philosophy.

82.3 The Breadth of the Razzaqian Curriculum

One of the most striking features of Razzaq's pedagogy is the extraordinary breadth of the intellectual resources he brought to bear on every question he engaged with. His conversations ranged freely across political theory, economic history, Islamic jurisprudence, Bengali literature, European philosophy, comparative sociology, and the specific history of Bengal and Bangladesh, drawing unexpected connections and juxtapositions that forced his interlocutors to see familiar problems in unfamiliar ways.

This breadth was not erudition for its own sake. It served a specific pedagogical purpose: it demonstrated, by continuous practice and example, that genuine understanding of any significant question requires the integration of multiple disciplinary perspectives and the willingness to follow intellectual threads wherever they lead, regardless of disciplinary boundaries. In a university system that was, then as now, organized around narrow disciplinary specializations and that tended to produce what might be called competent incompetents: people who knew a great deal about very little and very little about the larger context in which their specialized

knowledge was embedded, Razzaq's interdisciplinary practice was a standing reproach and a standing alternative.

The specific configuration of disciplinary resources that Razzaq brought to bear on Bangladeshi questions is itself philosophically significant. His training was in political economy, the discipline that Adam Smith and Karl Marx had developed as the systematic study of the relationship between economic organization and political power. His intellectual formation at the London School of Economics under Harold Laski added a sophisticated pluralist democratic theory. His deep reading in Islamic political and intellectual history added a dimension that neither Smith nor Marx nor Laski had fully addressed. His immersion in Bengali literature added a cultural and humanistic dimension that formal social science systematically undervalues. And his continuous engagement with the specific historical and social conditions of Bengal added a grounding in empirical particularity that prevented his thinking from becoming merely abstract.

This configuration suggests a model of intellectual formation that is very different from the one embodied in the standard university curriculum. It is a model in which depth of genuine engagement matters more than breadth of credential, in which the integration of diverse perspectives matters more than mastery of a single discipline, in which the capacity for continuous learning matters more than the possession of established knowledge, and in which intellectual honesty, which includes the willingness to say I do not know and to continue thinking rather than taking refuge in formulaic answers, is the supreme intellectual virtue.

82.4 The Relational Dimensions of Razzaqian Pedagogy

Perhaps the most distinctive and most philosophically significant feature of Razzaq's pedagogy was its relational character. Razzaq's teaching was inseparable from his relationships: not the impersonal relationships of teacher and student that characterize the standard educational transaction, but the particular, complex, and deeply personal relationships that he developed with each of the significant figures in his intellectual circle. He knew his students not as representatives of categories but as individuals, with their specific intellectual gifts, their specific limitations, their specific needs, and their specific potentials. And he shaped his engagement with each of them in accordance with this specific knowledge.

This relational pedagogy had several important dimensions. First, it was generous in ways that transcended the professional obligations of the teacher-student relationship. Razzaq's home was open to his students and former students in ways that were unusual even by the standards of a culture that places high value on hospitality. He made himself available for conversation and engagement at almost any time, creating an intellectual community organized around his presence and his practice rather than around the formal structures of the university. Second, his relational pedagogy was discriminating: he did not simply affirm whatever his interlocutors said but engaged critically, pushing back against sloppy thinking and intellectual dishonesty with a directness that could be uncomfortable but that was always in the service of genuine intellectual development rather than mere self-display. Third, his relational pedagogy was genuinely dialogical in Freire's sense: it was a relationship of mutual learning as well as of teaching, in which Razzaq himself was continuously developing his own understanding through his engagement with the people he taught and talked with.

The contrast with the standard model of academic pedagogy could hardly be more stark. In the standard model, the teacher is an expert who transmits established knowledge to students who are defined primarily by their ignorance. The relationship is fundamentally asymmetrical and is reinforced by a whole apparatus of institutional authority, formal assessment, credential certification, and social hierarchy. In Razzaq's model, the teacher is a more experienced and more widely read thinker who creates conditions for genuine inquiry, in a relationship that is fundamentally dialogical and that aims at the intellectual development of the student rather than at the demonstration of the teacher's expertise. The institutional apparatus that surrounds this relationship in a university context is, in Razzaq's practice, treated as irrelevant to the real business of education, which is thinking.

82.5 The Paradox of the Unpublished Teacher

The most paradoxical feature of Razzaq's life as an intellectual is the one that has been most commented on: his refusal to publish. In an academic system in which publication is the primary criterion of intellectual achievement, in which the book and the journal article are the standard measures of scholarly productivity, and in which the inability to point to a published output is typically treated as evidence of intellectual incompetence or failure, Razzaq published nothing of his own in the conventional sense. His contributions to knowledge were made entirely through his teaching, his conversations, and the influence he exercised on the published work of others. This is pedagogically significant in a way that has not always been fully appreciated.

By refusing to publish, Razzaq was not merely expressing a personal preference or a particular form of intellectual perfectionism, though both elements were certainly present. He was also making a philosophical statement about the nature of knowledge and the appropriate mode of its transmission. Knowledge that is published is fixed, codified, and separated from the process of inquiry that produced it. It presents conclusions that invite passive reception rather than active engagement. It creates authority structures in which the published expert stands above the unpublished learner. By keeping his knowledge in the form of live conversation, by insisting on the oral and dialogical mode of intellectual transmission, Razzaq was preserving what might be called the living quality of thought: its character as an ongoing process rather than a completed product.

This has profound pedagogical implications. If genuine thought is always process rather than product, if genuine understanding is always in development rather than completed, if the most important intellectual virtues are the capacities for continued inquiry, honest uncertainty, and collaborative engagement rather than the possession of established knowledge, then the pedagogical model that best serves these values is precisely the Socratic, dialogical model that Razzaq practiced, rather than the transmission model that the institution of academic publication reinforces. The unpublished teacher who engages his students in genuine philosophical dialogue may be, in this analysis, doing more for the development of genuine thought than the prolific publisher who broadcasts established conclusions to passive readers.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-THREE: AHMED SOFA AND THE EDUCATION OF THE BANGLADESHI MIND

The Writer as Pedagogue, the Essay as Provocation, and the Intellectual as Dissenter

83.1 Writing as Pedagogy

Ahmed Sofa was not a teacher in the institutional sense for most of his adult life. He did not hold a university appointment, did not deliver regular lectures to enrolled students, and did not develop formal curriculum materials. Yet he was, in one of the deepest and most important senses, one of the most consequential educators Bangladesh has produced. His medium was writing, and specifically the essay, the critical essay, the polemical essay, and the cultural essay in forms that drew on both the Bengali literary tradition and the best traditions of European critical prose. But the effect of his writing was pedagogical in the most fundamental sense: it changed how people thought, forced them to confront questions they had been avoiding, and modeled a form of intellectual engagement that was qualitatively different from anything the official educational system provided.

To understand Sofa's pedagogy, one must first understand his conception of what is wrong with Bangladeshi intellectual life. This conception is developed most fully in his essay *Bangalir Janabaddho Nritatva*, which can be translated roughly as *The Enclosed Anthropology of the Bengali*, a devastating critique of the intellectual complacency, opportunism, and servility that Sofa saw as defining characteristics of the Bangladeshi educated class. Sofa argued that the Bengali intellectual, with some notable exceptions, had failed to develop the kind of independent critical consciousness that genuine intellectual life requires, preferring instead to perform intellectual credentials, align themselves with whichever political faction offered the best opportunities for advancement, and avoid the genuine engagement with difficult questions that might put them at odds with those in power.

This critique is itself a pedagogical intervention. By naming and analyzing the pathology of Bangladeshi intellectual life with such precision and such force, Sofa was creating, for those readers who could receive it honestly, a kind of intellectual mirror in which they could see their own compromises and complicities reflected and recognized. The discomfort produced by this recognition, the discomfort of seeing oneself accurately described rather than flattered, is precisely the condition that genuine intellectual development requires. Sofa was practicing, in his essays, a form of what might be called negative pedagogy: a pedagogy that teaches not by providing positive models of correct thinking but by exposing and analyzing the specific forms of incorrect thinking that have become habitual and comfortable.

83.2 The Essay as a Form of Democratic Education

The essay, as Sofa practiced it, is itself a pedagogically significant form. Unlike the academic monograph, which addresses a specialized audience of credentialed experts, or the political pamphlet, which addresses a mass audience in simplified and mobilizing language, the essay addresses anyone who can read with genuine attention and genuine willingness to engage. It is democratic in its address while being demanding in its content. It refuses both the exclusivity of

academic discourse and the simplifications of popular discourse, insisting instead on a form of intelligent engagement that is in principle available to any literate reader who brings genuine curiosity and genuine honesty to the act of reading.

Sofa's essays are written in Bengali prose of extraordinary quality: dense, allusive, precise, and driven by an intellectual urgency that communicates itself even before the specific arguments are fully grasped. He writes as someone who has something urgent and important to say and who respects his reader enough to say it without condescension or simplification. This respect for the reader is itself a pedagogical choice. It creates a relationship between writer and reader that is very different from the standard relationship between the educated expert and the ignorant student. It positions the reader as a capable, intelligent adult who is being invited into genuine intellectual engagement, not being lectured to or tested on a prescribed body of knowledge.

The specific topics that Sofa addressed in his essays constitute what might be called an unofficial curriculum of Bangladeshi intellectual life: the history of Bengali Muslim identity and its relationship to broader South Asian and Islamic intellectual traditions; the politics of the liberation war and its aftermath; the relationship between Bengali culture and the colonial inheritance; the nature of literature and its relationship to politics and society; the failings of the Bangladeshi educated class; the possibilities and limitations of secular and Islamic thought in the Bangladeshi context. These are precisely the topics that the official educational curriculum of Bangladesh systematically avoids, either because they are too politically controversial, or because addressing them honestly would require a kind of critical engagement with official narratives that the educational system is designed to discourage.

83.3 Sofa's Vision of the Educated Person

From Sofa's essays and from the testimony of those who knew him, it is possible to reconstruct a vision of what he believed genuine education should produce: what the educated person, in the fullest and most admirable sense, looks like. This vision is demanding and, by the standards of what the Bangladeshi educational system actually produces, deeply critical.

The genuinely educated person, in Sofa's implicit conception, is first of all someone who thinks for themselves: someone who has developed the capacity to form their own judgments through genuine engagement with evidence and argument rather than simply adopting the views of whichever authority figure has been most influential in their social formation. This does not mean the rejection of all intellectual authority: it means the ability to engage critically with intellectual authorities, to understand their arguments, to assess their evidence, to recognize their limitations, and to develop one's own position through this process of critical engagement. The inability to think for oneself, the tendency to adopt intellectual positions on the basis of social affiliation rather than genuine assessment, and the failure to develop the intellectual courage necessary to maintain positions that are unpopular or socially costly: these are, for Sofa, the defining failures of the Bangladeshi educated class.

The genuinely educated person is also, in Sofa's conception, someone who is honest, both intellectually and personally. Intellectual honesty means the willingness to follow arguments wherever they lead, to acknowledge when one is wrong, to change one's mind when the evidence

demands it, and to say what one actually thinks rather than what is expedient to say. Personal honesty means the consistency between private conviction and public statement, the refusal to perform positions that one does not genuinely hold, and the willingness to accept the social costs of genuine honesty in a society that often rewards conformity and punishes dissent. Sofa's own life was a sustained demonstration of these qualities, which is part of what makes him an exemplary rather than merely interesting figure.

The genuinely educated person is also someone who is engaged: engaged with the specific conditions of the society in which they live, with the problems that that society faces, and with the intellectual resources available for understanding and addressing those problems. Sofa had no patience for the kind of aesthetic or philosophical detachment that presents itself as intellectual superiority while actually representing a failure of intellectual responsibility. He believed that the intellectual's obligation to genuine thought carried with it an obligation to genuine engagement with the social and political conditions that made thought either possible or impossible. The retreat into private cultivation, into art for art's sake or philosophy for philosophy's sake, was, in his analysis, a form of intellectual cowardice masquerading as refinement.

83.4 The Critique of Credentials

One of the most pedagogically significant aspects of Sofa's thought is his sustained critique of the credential system as a substitute for genuine intellectual development. This critique is implicit in the contrast he draws between the genuinely educated person and the credentialed intellectual, but it is also explicit in various passages of his essays and in his own refusal of the conventional academic career.

Sofa's argument is not that formal education is worthless or that credentials have no legitimate function. It is that the credential system, in the specific conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh, has become detached from the genuine intellectual development it is supposed to represent and has become instead a mechanism for the reproduction of social hierarchy under the guise of meritocracy. The holder of multiple degrees and prestigious institutional affiliations is not necessarily, and in Bangladesh's specific institutional context is often specifically not, someone who thinks seriously, who writes honestly, or who engages genuinely with the problems of the society in which they live. The credential represents not genuine intellectual achievement but successful navigation of an institutional system that rewards conformity, deference, and the performance of prescribed patterns of thought rather than genuine inquiry, independent judgment, and the willingness to challenge established authorities.

This critique has direct and immediate implications for how we should think about educational reform in Bangladesh. If the problem is not merely that the educational system is inadequate in some technical sense but that it is structurally organized around the production of credentials rather than the development of genuine intellectual capacity, then the reform that is needed is not merely the improvement of teaching quality, the expansion of access, or the updating of curricula, important as all these things are. It is the more fundamental transformation of the entire system of institutional incentives that currently rewards conformity and punishes genuine thought.

83.5 The Literary Dimension of Sofa's Pedagogy

Ahmed Sofa was not only a cultural critic and polemicist. He was also a writer of fiction, poetry, and memoir, and this literary dimension of his work is pedagogically significant in ways that complement and deepen his directly critical work. Literature, as Sofa understood and practiced it, is a form of knowledge that is distinct from but not inferior to the conceptual knowledge of philosophy and social science. It is knowledge of the specific, the particular, the experiential, and the emotional dimensions of human life that conceptual knowledge systematically abstracts from. And the specific form of knowledge that literature provides is, for pedagogical purposes, indispensable: it is the knowledge that develops empathy, imagination, and the capacity to understand experiences different from one's own, capacities that are as essential to genuine education as the capacity for logical analysis and systematic argument.

Sofa's fiction and memoir explore the specific textures of Bengali Muslim experience in the twentieth century: the experience of poverty, of educational aspiration, of political engagement and disillusionment, of the liberation war and its aftermath, and of the complex negotiations of identity that characterize the life of a Bengali Muslim intellectual in a world shaped by colonialism, partition, nationalism, and postcolonial modernity. These explorations are pedagogically valuable not because they provide correct answers to the questions they engage but because they create the conditions for genuine imaginative engagement with experiences that are both specific and representative: specific in their Bengali Muslim cultural particularity and representative in their humanity.

The combination of literary and critical work in Sofa's output suggests a model of intellectual formation that refuses the standard division of labor between the sciences, which are supposed to provide knowledge, and the arts, which are supposed to provide aesthetic pleasure. In Sofa's practice, literature and criticism are complementary modes of the same fundamental project: the development of genuine understanding of the human condition in general and of Bengali Muslim experience in particular. This integrated model is pedagogically significant because it refuses the narrowing and specialization that the standard academic curriculum enforces and insists instead on the kind of comprehensive intellectual formation that genuine human development requires.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-FOUR: SALIMULLAH KHAN AND THE PEDAGOGY OF DECOLONIZATION

Theory, Practice, and the Transformation of the Educated Mind

84.1 The Theoretical Framework of Decolonizing Pedagogy

Salimullah Khan's contribution to the tradition's educational philosophy is the most theoretically developed and the most explicitly connected to the international literature on pedagogy, postcolonial theory, and the psychology of colonized subjectivity. Drawing on Jacques Lacan's theory of the subject, Karl Marx's analysis of ideology and social reproduction, Frantz Fanon's account of the psychological dimensions of colonial domination, and Edward Said's analysis of

the epistemic dimensions of imperialism, Khan has developed what might be called a pedagogy of decolonization: a theory of education whose central purpose is the liberation of the colonized subject from the internalized forms of colonial domination that continue to structure Bangladeshi intellectual and social life even after political independence has been achieved.

The central concept in Khan's educational theory is what Fanon called the colonized consciousness: the condition of a person who has been formed by a colonial educational system to see the world through the cognitive and evaluative frameworks of the colonizer, to aspire to the social positions and cultural forms that the colonial hierarchy prizes, and to experience their own indigenous cultural resources, their language, their intellectual traditions, their cultural practices, as inferior to the imported equivalents that the colonial system valorizes. This condition is not a simple and transparent form of self-deception that can be overcome merely by being told about it. It is a deep structural feature of the colonized subject's formation, one that shapes not only what they think but how they think, not only what they value but what they find beautiful, exciting, authoritative, and legitimate.

The educational implication of this analysis is that genuine decolonization requires more than the reform of explicit curricula, the substitution of Bangladeshi content for British content, the addition of Bengali-language texts to syllabuses dominated by English-language texts, or the formal replacement of English with Bengali as a medium of instruction. It requires the transformation of the deeper cognitive and evaluative frameworks through which students understand and relate to knowledge itself. It requires a form of education that enables students to recognize the colonial formation of their own intellectual dispositions and to develop, through this recognition, the capacity for genuinely autonomous thought that colonial education has suppressed.

84.2 Lacan and the Formation of the Intellectual Subject

The most distinctive element of Khan's educational theory is his use of Jacques Lacan's theory of the subject to analyze the formation of the Bangladeshi intellectual. Lacan's theory, developed in a series of seminars and writings from the late 1950s through the 1970s, argues that the human subject is fundamentally constituted through its relationship to language and to the symbolic order of social norms and values that language carries. The subject does not exist prior to language and then acquire it as an instrument. Rather, the subject is constituted through its inscription in language, through its assumption of the positions that language and social structure make available to it. This means that the question of what language one is inscribed in is not merely a practical or instrumental question. It is a constitutive question: a question about who one is, what one's relationship to knowledge is, and what forms of thought and desire are available to one.

Applying this framework to the Bangladeshi educational situation, Khan argues that a student who is educated primarily or exclusively in English is not merely learning a foreign language. They are being inscribed in a symbolic order that is alien to their own cultural formation, that positions their indigenous language and culture as inferior, and that constitutes them as subjects whose intellectual authority depends on their successful assimilation to English-language norms and frameworks. The psychological consequences of this inscription are multiple and complex:

they include the devaluation of indigenous intellectual resources, the internalization of colonial hierarchies of value, the development of what Khan describes, citing Freud, as a perverse relationship between words and deeds in which the ruling class's professed commitment to Bengali culture is contradicted by its actual practice of cultural anglophilia.

Khan's Lacanian analysis of the Bangladeshi educational situation is controversial and has been contested from several directions. Critics on the left have argued that the Lacanian framework is too focused on the psychological dimensions of colonial domination and not sufficiently attentive to the material and structural dimensions of educational inequality. Critics on the right have argued that the emphasis on decolonization as a psychological project underestimates the genuine intellectual value of engagement with English-language and Western intellectual traditions. And critics from within the tradition of Bengali studies have questioned whether the Lacanian framework, which was developed in a specific French clinical and cultural context, can be straightforwardly applied to the very different cultural and institutional context of Bangladesh.

Khan's response to these criticisms is characteristically rigorous and multidimensional. To the left critics, he argues that the psychological and the material are internally related: the internalization of colonial hierarchies of value is itself a material condition, one that shapes the allocation of educational resources, the structure of academic appointments, and the distribution of social respect in ways that have concrete consequences for every dimension of Bangladeshi life. To the right critics, he argues that genuine engagement with Western intellectual traditions requires critical distance from them, which is precisely what a colonized consciousness cannot achieve: only by decolonizing the subject's relationship to Western knowledge, by recognizing both its genuine insights and its specific limitations and biases, can genuine intellectual engagement with it occur. To the critics from Bengali studies, he acknowledges the need for careful translation and adaptation of theoretical frameworks across cultural contexts while insisting that the basic psychoanalytic insight about the constitutive role of language in the formation of the subject is robust enough to survive this translation.

84.3 The Practice of Decolonizing Pedagogy in the Classroom

Khan's decolonizing pedagogy is not merely theoretical. It is also a specific set of classroom practices that he has developed and refined over decades of teaching at various Bangladeshi universities. These practices can be understood as the concrete instantiation of his theoretical commitments, the ways in which the abstract argument for decolonization is translated into specific pedagogical choices about what to teach, how to teach it, and what kinds of intellectual development to aim for.

The most fundamental of these practices is the insistence on Bengali as the medium of intellectual engagement, even when teaching in an English-medium institution. Khan teaches at North South University, which is formally an English-medium private university. Yet he conducts his teaching, including his theoretical classes on Lacan, Marx, and Fanon, in Bengali. This is not a concession to student deficiency in English. It is a pedagogical choice grounded in the theoretical argument that genuine intellectual engagement requires the full mobilization of the learner's cognitive and linguistic resources, which for Bengali-speaking students means

engagement in Bengali. Teaching complex theoretical material in English, in Khan's analysis, requires students to expend cognitive resources on linguistic translation that should be available for intellectual engagement, and it positions their mother tongue as intellectually inadequate in ways that reinforce the very colonized consciousness that decolonizing pedagogy is trying to overcome.

A second practice is the systematic integration of Bengali intellectual resources into the teaching of theoretical material that is typically presented as exclusively Western. When teaching political philosophy, Khan does not begin with Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau and then add Bengali or Islamic perspectives as optional supplements. He begins with the specific political and philosophical problems of Bangladeshi society and uses both Western and Bengali intellectual resources as tools for understanding those problems. This reversed orientation, from local problem to global resource rather than from global theory to local application, is pedagogically significant because it positions the student's own cultural and intellectual context as the primary site of intellectual engagement rather than as a derivative or peripheral application of universal theories developed elsewhere.

A third practice is the explicit engagement with the politics of knowledge within the classroom: the consistent examination of whose knowledge counts as knowledge, whose perspectives are treated as authoritative, whose intellectual traditions are included in the curriculum and whose are excluded, and whose language is treated as an appropriate medium for serious intellectual work. This meta-cognitive dimension of Khan's pedagogy is designed to develop in students not only specific intellectual skills and knowledge but also the critical awareness of the conditions of knowledge production that genuine intellectual autonomy requires.

84.4 Khan's Engagement with Students: The YouTube Classroom and Public Pedagogy

One of the most significant dimensions of Khan's pedagogy in the contemporary period is his development of what might be called a public pedagogical presence through digital media. Khan's lectures, interviews, and public appearances are widely shared and viewed on YouTube and other digital platforms, and his online presence has created a form of public pedagogy that reaches audiences far beyond the students enrolled in his formal university courses.

The significance of this development for the tradition's educational philosophy is multiple. First, it represents a partial solution to the problem of institutional reach: Khan's direct pedagogical influence within formal educational institutions is necessarily limited by the structures of formal enrollment, academic scheduling, and institutional access. His online presence extends this influence to anyone with internet access who is interested in the questions he engages, creating a form of open-access intellectual engagement that resonates with the tradition's commitment to democratic intellectual culture. Second, the specific character of his online pedagogy, combining theoretical rigor with accessibility, political urgency with intellectual precision, and personal intellectual style with substantive engagement, models a form of public intellectual practice that has influenced a significant number of young Bangladeshis to take ideas seriously in ways that the standard educational system has failed to achieve. Third, his online presence creates a form of accountability that formal academic teaching does not always provide: his arguments are

available for public scrutiny, public criticism, and public engagement in ways that reinforce rather than undermine the democratic and dialogical character of his pedagogical commitments.

The development of Khan's online pedagogical presence also raises important questions about the relationship between digital media and genuine intellectual development. There is a genuine tension between the depth of engagement that genuine intellectual formation requires and the shallow, fragmented, and attention-deficit character of much digital media consumption. Khan himself has addressed this tension in various public statements, arguing that the solution is not the rejection of digital media but its disciplined and critical use: the use of digital platforms to create conditions for genuine intellectual engagement rather than to provide the illusion of intellectual engagement without its substance.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-FIVE: THE PEDAGOGICAL CIVIL WAR: BENGALI MEDIUM VERSUS ENGLISH MEDIUM

Language, Power, Epistemology, and the Politics of Educational Access

85.1 The Historical Origins of the Division

The division between Bengali-medium and English-medium education in Bangladesh is not a recent phenomenon. It has its roots in the specific educational policies of the colonial period and in the complex social and political dynamics that those policies set in motion. The British colonial administration, following the logic of the Macaulay Minute and the educational policies developed in its aftermath, created a hierarchically differentiated educational system in which English-medium education was associated with the ruling colonial class and with access to the administrative and professional positions that colonial society offered, while vernacular-medium education was associated with the mass of the population and with exclusion from these positions.

This colonial educational hierarchy was not abolished with political independence. It was, in various ways, reproduced and even reinforced under postcolonial conditions. The Pakistani period saw attempts to impose Urdu as an alternative imperial language, which the Language Movement of 1952 successfully resisted, but the general structure of educational hierarchy, in which English-medium education was associated with elite status and Bengali-medium education was associated with mass accessibility, remained intact. The independent Bangladesh of 1971 inherited this structure and, despite various reform initiatives, has not succeeded in fundamentally transforming it.

In 2026, Bangladesh has a tripartite educational system that reflects and reinforces profound social inequalities. At the top of the hierarchy are the English-medium schools and universities, which cater primarily to affluent urban families and which are oriented toward the preparation of students for global professional careers in which English-language competence is a prerequisite. In the middle of the hierarchy are the Bengali-medium general education schools and universities, which cater to the broad middle class and which provide the bulk of Bangladesh's

educated workforce. At the bottom of the hierarchy are the madrasa institutions, which cater primarily to families from lower economic strata and which have been systematically marginalized within the broader educational landscape. Each of these three tracks is internally differentiated in quality and outcomes, but the general structure of hierarchical differentiation among them is a persistent feature of the system that has proven remarkably resistant to reform.

85.2 The Tradition's Position and its Philosophical Grounding

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has maintained a consistent position on the medium of instruction question throughout its existence, a position that is grounded in the broader philosophical commitments of the tradition and that has become more rather than less insistent as the social consequences of the existing division have become more clearly visible.

The core of the tradition's position is the argument that Bengali should be established as the primary medium of instruction at all levels of the educational system in Bangladesh, including at the university level and in professional education. This argument rests on several distinct but related philosophical claims. The first is the psycholinguistic claim that education in one's mother tongue is more effective than education in a foreign language because it enables the full mobilization of the learner's cognitive resources and prevents the cognitive overload that occurs when learners must simultaneously process complex intellectual content and operate in a language that is not fully internalized. The second is the political claim that the maintenance of English-medium education as the gateway to elite positions reproduces colonial hierarchies of access and privilege in ways that are fundamentally inconsistent with the democratic and egalitarian values that Bangladesh's founding principles affirm. The third is the epistemological claim that the privileging of English-language knowledge over Bengali-language knowledge reinforces the colonial epistemic hierarchy in ways that devalue the genuine intellectual resources of Bengali culture and prevent the full development of Bangladesh's intellectual potential.

These three claims are distinct but reinforcing. The psycholinguistic claim grounds the argument in cognitive science and educational research. The political claim grounds it in the analysis of social inequality and democratic theory. The epistemological claim grounds it in the philosophical analysis of knowledge and its cultural dimensions. Together, they constitute a comprehensive and multidimensional case for Bengali-medium education that goes well beyond the simple assertion of linguistic nationalism.

Khan's specific version of this argument has been developed with particular rigor and has drawn on both the Bengali tradition's resources and the international literature on language and education. He has cited research from multiple international contexts to support the psycholinguistic claim, including the Finnish model of education in which instruction in the mother tongue at all levels has been associated with very high educational outcomes, and the Israeli model of post-independence educational reform in which the development of Hebrew as a comprehensive intellectual medium was seen as inseparable from the project of building a genuinely independent democratic society. He has also cited the evidence from Bangladesh's own educational experience, where the persistently lower performance of Bengali-medium students in access to elite positions is, in his analysis, not evidence of the inherent superiority of

English-medium education but evidence of the systemic disadvantages that the existing hierarchical structure imposes on Bengali-medium students.

85.3 The Critique of the Tradition's Position

The tradition's position on Bengali-medium education has attracted significant criticism from several directions, and intellectual honesty requires that these criticisms be taken seriously and engaged with genuinely rather than simply dismissed.

The most powerful criticism is the globalization argument: in an increasingly interconnected global economy, English-language competence is a genuine and significant form of capital that has real consequences for individual life opportunities. Depriving Bangladeshi students of English-medium education, or reducing its quality and accessibility, would not liberate them from colonial hierarchies but would disadvantage them in global competition for education, employment, and social mobility. The Finnish and Israeli examples that Khan cites are, in this analysis, insufficiently analogous to the Bangladeshi situation: Finland is a small, homogeneous, high-income society with a language spoken only by a small global community, for whom the development of a comprehensive national intellectual medium is a genuine necessity rather than a mere preference; Israel's post-independence linguistic project involved the revival of a language with a continuous literary tradition but little contemporary usage, a situation very different from Bangladesh's, where Bengali is already a fully functional medium of contemporary intellectual life. The relevant international comparisons, in this criticism, might be the experiences of countries like India, where a pragmatic multilingual educational policy that includes genuine English-language education has been associated with significant economic and intellectual development.

A second criticism is the economic reality argument: the demand for English-medium education in Bangladesh is not manufactured by elite conspiracy but reflects the genuine preferences of families across a wide range of economic circumstances who understand that English-language competence is associated with better economic outcomes. The rapid expansion of English-medium schools and private universities in Bangladesh over the past three decades is driven by popular demand, not by elite imposition. To dismiss this demand as false consciousness or colonial cringe is to adopt a paternalistic stance that refuses to take seriously the genuine interests and judgments of the people whose lives are affected.

A third criticism is the quality argument: the problem with Bangladeshi education is not that too much of it is conducted in English but that the overall quality of instruction, regardless of medium, is too low. Shifting to Bengali medium without simultaneously addressing the deeper problems of curriculum quality, teacher training, assessment systems, and institutional governance would produce Bengali-medium education of the same inadequate quality as the existing Bengali-medium education, without the additional benefit of English-language competence.

85.4 The Tradition's Response and the Evidence Base

The tradition's response to these criticisms is developed with considerable sophistication in Khan's public intellectual work and deserves careful examination. On the globalization argument, Khan's response distinguishes between English-language competence, which he does not oppose, and English-medium instruction, which he does oppose. The argument is that students can develop genuine English-language competence through well-designed English as a second language instruction within a Bengali-medium educational system, and that this approach is likely to produce better outcomes both in English-language competence and in overall intellectual development than the immersion in an English-medium system that prematurely displaces the mother tongue as the medium of intellectual formation. The relevant question is not whether Bangladeshi students should learn English but whether English should be the medium of instruction in subjects like mathematics, history, philosophy, and social science, subjects in which the medium of instruction has direct consequences for the quality of intellectual engagement.

On the economic reality argument, Khan's response draws on his Lacanian analysis of desire and ideology. The fact that people desire English-medium education does not mean that this desire reflects their genuine interests or that satisfying it produces genuine human development. Desire is socially constituted, and desires that are constituted by a colonial epistemic hierarchy are precisely the desires that a decolonizing project must critically examine rather than simply satisfy. This is not paternalism in the objectionable sense: it is the recognition that genuine autonomy requires the critical examination of the conditions under which one's desires have been formed, and that this critical examination is itself a pedagogical project rather than an external imposition.

On the quality argument, Khan agrees that curriculum quality, teacher training, and institutional governance are all genuine problems that must be addressed in any serious educational reform. But he argues that addressing these problems within a framework that maintains the existing linguistic hierarchy will not produce genuine educational quality but merely a higher-quality version of the same colonial epistemic structure. Genuine quality in education requires not only technical improvements in instruction but a fundamental reorientation of the entire system's relationship to knowledge, culture, and identity, and this reorientation cannot occur without the simultaneous transformation of the medium in which intellectual engagement is conducted.

85.5 International Comparative Evidence

The international comparative evidence on medium of instruction is genuinely complex, and any honest engagement with the tradition's position requires attention to this complexity. The evidence from UNESCO, the World Bank, and independent educational researchers consistently supports the proposition that children learn more effectively in their mother tongue, particularly in the early years of education, and that premature transition to instruction in a second language is associated with learning losses that are particularly severe for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This is the most robust finding in the comparative literature on language and education and it provides strong empirical support for one dimension of the tradition's argument.

However, the evidence also suggests that the relationship between language of instruction and educational outcomes is mediated by a complex set of contextual factors, including the quality of instruction, the availability of educational materials, the social and economic resources of learners and their families, and the broader social and institutional environment in which education occurs. Countries that have successfully maintained indigenous-language education at the highest levels have typically done so in the context of comprehensive systems of support for the development of those languages as intellectual media, including investment in translation, in the development of technical and scientific vocabularies, in the training of teachers in the relevant language, and in the creation of a complete literature in that language covering the full range of contemporary intellectual and professional fields. Bangladesh has not yet created these conditions for Bengali, and the tradition's position implies a massive investment in their creation, an investment that would require political will, institutional capacity, and resources that the current Bangladeshi state has not demonstrated the ability to mobilize.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-SIX: TEACHING THE TRADITION: CURRICULUM DESIGN AND PEDAGOGICAL MATERIALS

From Philosophical Insight to Classroom Practice

86.1 The Challenge of Curricular Translation

The intellectual insights of Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan have been developed primarily in the context of adult intellectual life: in university teaching, in published essays and books, in public lectures and media appearances, and in the informal conversations of an intellectual community. Translating these insights into curriculum materials for different levels of the Bangladeshi educational system is a genuinely difficult challenge, one that requires not only familiarity with the tradition's intellectual content but also expertise in pedagogy, curriculum design, and the specific learning needs and capabilities of different student populations.

This challenge is not unique to the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan. It is a general problem in the translation of sophisticated intellectual work into educational practice. The history of education is littered with examples of philosophical insights that have been reduced to formulaic abstractions, catechetical simplifications, or superficial buzzwords in the process of curricular translation. John Dewey's philosophy of education, for example, was translated in American educational practice into a progressivism that often preserved the surface forms of his recommendations while losing their philosophical substance. Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed has been translated in various contexts into a method of small-group discussion that preserves the dialogical form of his approach while losing the critical consciousness that he intended it to produce. The danger of similar reductions applies to any attempt to translate the tradition's insights into curriculum materials.

The specific risks of curricular reduction that the tradition faces are several. First, there is the risk of hagiographic simplification: the reduction of three complex, internally contradictory, and

mutually critical thinkers to heroic figures in a nationalist narrative, stripping away the tensions, controversies, and criticisms that are essential to genuine intellectual engagement with their work. Second, there is the risk of ideological instrumentalization: the use of the tradition's insights to provide legitimation for a particular political agenda, whether leftist, nationalist, or Islamist, while suppressing the dimensions of the tradition that complicate or challenge that agenda. Third, there is the risk of methodological reductionism: the translation of the tradition's substantive arguments into a set of prescribed methods or approaches that are applied mechanically without the genuine intellectual engagement that the tradition's own practice models.

86.2 Curriculum for Secondary Education

The appropriate entry point for the tradition's insights in the formal educational curriculum is secondary education, at the level of approximately grades nine through twelve, where students have developed sufficient cognitive maturity to engage with complex ideas and sufficient historical knowledge to contextualize the tradition's arguments.

A curriculum unit on the tradition at the secondary level should aim at several distinct learning outcomes. The first is biographical and historical: students should develop a basic understanding of the lives and historical contexts of the three figures, situating them within the specific history of Bengali Muslim society in the twentieth century and understanding how their intellectual work responded to the specific historical challenges of their time. The second is intellectual and philosophical: students should develop some familiarity with the central ideas associated with each figure, including Razzaq's political and social analysis, Sofa's cultural criticism, and Khan's decolonization theory, understanding these ideas not as abstract propositions but as responses to specific intellectual and social problems. The third is critical and analytical: students should develop the capacity to evaluate the tradition's claims critically, to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and to form their own reasoned judgments about their significance and limitations.

The pedagogical approach appropriate for secondary education engagement with the tradition should draw directly on the tradition's own pedagogical values. This means emphasizing discussion and dialogue over transmission and reception, primary texts over secondary summaries wherever possible, and genuine intellectual engagement over the memorization of prescribed conclusions. It means creating classroom conditions in which students feel entitled to ask genuine questions, to disagree with the texts they are reading, and to develop their own positions through the process of critical engagement rather than simply reproducing positions prescribed by the teacher or the textbook.

Specific texts that might be incorporated into a secondary-level curriculum unit on the tradition include selections from Ahmed Sofa's essays in Bengali translation at appropriate levels of accessibility, excerpts from Salimullah Khan's more accessible public writings and interviews, and accounts of Abdur Razzaq's thought drawn from memoirs and biographical writings by those who knew him. The absence of Razzaq's own published work is a genuine curricular challenge, and addressing it requires the kind of archival and curatorial work on his oral legacy that Part Eight identified as one of the tradition's most urgent institutional needs.

86.3 Curriculum for University Education

At the university level, the tradition's insights can be engaged with far greater depth and complexity than is possible in secondary education. A comprehensive university curriculum unit or course on the tradition might be organized around several distinct but related themes, each of which connects the tradition's specific intellectual work to broader theoretical and historical contexts.

The first theme is political philosophy and democratic theory, engaging the tradition's analyses of the relationship between political power, intellectual authority, and democratic governance in the specific conditions of Bangladesh. This theme connects to broader theoretical traditions including Laski's pluralist democratic socialism, Dewey's democratic educational philosophy, Freire's critical pedagogy, and the postcolonial critique of liberal democracy's complicity with colonial domination. It requires students to engage with both the theoretical frameworks and the specific historical evidence about how political power has actually operated in Bangladesh across seven decades of independence.

The second theme is cultural identity and the politics of language, engaging the tradition's sustained analysis of Bengali Muslim identity, the language question, and the relationship between cultural formation and political possibility. This theme connects to broader theoretical traditions including the sociology of nationalism, the anthropology of cultural identity, the linguistics of language planning and language policy, and the cultural theory of postcolonialism. It requires students to engage with both the theoretical arguments and the specific historical and cultural evidence about how Bengali Muslim identity has been constructed, contested, and developed across several centuries.

The third theme is knowledge, power, and epistemic justice, engaging the tradition's analysis of the colonial epistemic hierarchy and its continuing consequences for Bangladeshi intellectual and institutional life. This theme connects to broader theoretical traditions including epistemology, the sociology of knowledge, feminist standpoint theory, and the emerging field of epistemic justice. It requires students to engage with both the theoretical arguments about the social conditions of knowledge production and the specific institutional evidence about how the Bangladesh educational system actually allocates epistemic authority and intellectual recognition.

The fourth theme is pedagogy and human development, engaging the tradition's implicit and explicit educational philosophies and their implications for the reform of Bangladeshi education. This theme connects to broader theoretical traditions including the philosophy of education, comparative educational research, and the theory and practice of educational reform in postcolonial contexts. It requires students to engage with both the theoretical arguments about what genuine education requires and the specific comparative evidence about what kinds of educational systems actually produce the outcomes that democratic and developmental theory demands.

86.4 Pedagogical Methods for Teaching the Tradition

The methods appropriate for teaching the tradition's insights must themselves be consistent with the tradition's educational values. This is a non-trivial requirement, because the dominant methods of Bangladeshi university education, lecture-based transmission, rote learning for examination purposes, and the reproduction of prescribed interpretations rather than the development of independent critical judgment, are precisely the methods that the tradition's educational philosophy critiques as inadequate and as reproducing the colonial educational hierarchy in a new institutional form.

A pedagogy adequate to the tradition's values would incorporate several specific features. It would make primary texts available and would require students to engage directly with them rather than with secondary summaries or authorized interpretations. It would create structured opportunities for genuine discussion in which students are expected to develop and defend their own positions rather than simply rehearsing what they have been told. It would provide explicit instruction in the skills of critical reading, argument analysis, and evidence assessment that genuine intellectual engagement requires. It would assess students on the quality of their independent thinking rather than on the accuracy of their reproduction of prescribed knowledge. And it would model, in the teacher's own practice, the intellectual virtues that the tradition prizes: genuine curiosity, intellectual honesty, the willingness to acknowledge uncertainty, and the commitment to following arguments wherever they lead.

These requirements have direct implications for teacher training. Teachers who are themselves products of a transmission-based educational system, who have been taught that their job is to transmit established knowledge rather than to facilitate genuine inquiry, cannot be expected to implement a dialogical and inquiry-based pedagogy without substantial retraining and ongoing professional support. The development of a genuine pedagogy adequate to the tradition's values therefore requires not only curriculum development but also comprehensive reform of teacher education at all levels of the Bangladeshi system.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-SEVEN: MADRASA EDUCATION AND THE TRADITION'S COMPLEX ENGAGEMENT

Integration, Recognition, and the Politics of Religious Learning

87.1 The Madrasa System and its Historical Significance

The madrasa system of Islamic education is one of the oldest and most extensive educational institutions in Bangladesh. Its roots go back to the establishment of Islamic learning in the Bengal delta following the expansion of Islamic civilization into the region from the thirteenth century onward, and in some forms it predates the British colonial period by several centuries. In its contemporary form, the madrasa system in Bangladesh encompasses two main types of institutions: the Aliya madrasas, which are government-regulated and which follow a curriculum that combines Islamic subjects with secular academic content roughly parallel to the general education system, and the Qawmi madrasas, which are privately organized and which follow a

more exclusively Islamic curriculum based on the Dars-e-Nizami tradition of classical Islamic learning.

The scale and social significance of the madrasa system in Bangladesh is often underappreciated by analyses of Bangladeshi education that focus primarily on the general and English-medium systems. As of recent estimates, there are approximately ten thousand registered madrasas of both types in Bangladesh, with a combined enrollment in the millions. For a significant portion of Bangladesh's rural and lower-income population, the madrasa system is not a second-best alternative to the general education system but the primary or even sole pathway to formal education. The quality of madrasa education is highly variable, but at its best it provides genuine intellectual formation in the Islamic sciences, including Quranic studies, hadith, fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and the Arabic language, as well as Arabic and Persian literature and the broader intellectual traditions associated with classical Islamic learning.

The relationship between the madrasa system and the broader Bangladeshi educational and social system has been deeply contested throughout the postcolonial period. Secular nationalists and liberals have often viewed the madrasa system with suspicion, associating it with religious conservatism, political Islam, and the reproduction of intellectual backwardness. Islamists have defended the madrasa system as the authentic expression of Islamic educational values in the face of a secular state educational system that is hostile to Islamic identity. The Bangladesh state has oscillated between policies of integration, reform, and benign neglect in its relationship with the madrasa system, without achieving a stable or satisfactory resolution of the fundamental tensions that the system's existence within a secular constitutional framework creates.

87.2 The Tradition's Engagement: From Abdur Razzaq to Salimullah Khan

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has maintained a complex and evolving engagement with the madrasa system that resists simple characterization as either supportive or critical. This complexity reflects the tradition's broader commitment to intellectual honesty over ideological consistency: to following arguments wherever they lead rather than adopting a fixed position and defending it regardless of the evidence.

Abdur Razzaq's engagement with the Islamic educational tradition, including its madrasa dimension, was shaped by his profound knowledge of Islamic intellectual history and his sense that the genuine achievements of that tradition deserved serious intellectual engagement rather than dismissal. He was not uncritical of the contemporary madrasa system, which he regarded as too defensive, too narrowly focused on the preservation of established learning, and too disconnected from the intellectual challenges posed by modernity. But his critique was the critique of someone who took Islamic learning seriously and who believed that genuine reform required genuine engagement with the tradition's own resources rather than their replacement by imported secular alternatives.

Ahmed Sofa's engagement with the madrasa system was more complicated and more emotionally charged. He grew up in a social environment in which madrasa education was a significant presence, and his writing reflects both an intimate familiarity with the culture of Islamic learning and a sharp critical perspective on the ways in which that culture had been

ossified, instrumentalized, and disconnected from genuine intellectual development. Sofa did not romanticize the madrasa system, but he also did not dismiss it. His critique was directed not at the tradition of Islamic learning as such but at the institutional and social conditions under which that tradition had been reproduced in the specific context of colonial and postcolonial Bangladesh.

Salimullah Khan's engagement with the madrasa system has been the most explicitly political and the most publicly controversial of the three figures. His support in 2017 for the Awami League government's recognition of the Dawra degree awarded by Qawmi madrasas provoked strong reactions from both the secular left, which saw the recognition as a concession to political Islam, and from Islamist quarters, which welcomed it for reasons that did not necessarily align with Khan's own analysis. Khan's defense of his position was grounded in the argument that the non-recognition of Qawmi madrasa credentials was a form of epistemic injustice, a denial of the validity of an intellectual tradition and the credentials it awarded that was driven not by principled concerns about educational quality but by the secular elite's cultural condescension toward Islamic learning.

87.3 Toward a Theory of Educational Pluralism

The tradition's engagement with the madrasa system, taken as a whole, points toward what might be called a theory of educational pluralism: a conception of the educational system not as a single hierarchically unified structure in which one set of values and methods is applied uniformly to all learners, but as a genuinely pluralist ecosystem in which different educational traditions coexist, interact, and mutually enrich each other, while all being held to genuine standards of intellectual quality and honest engagement.

This theory of educational pluralism is grounded in the tradition's deeper philosophical commitments. The tradition's anti-colonialism extends to a critique of the colonial state's tendency to impose a single educational model on a diverse society, suppressing the genuine intellectual traditions of indigenous and religious communities in the name of a universal modernity that was in practice culturally particular. The tradition's commitment to epistemic justice extends to a recognition of the genuine intellectual achievements of the madrasa tradition, which has produced serious and sophisticated thinking about ethics, jurisprudence, theology, and the human condition that deserves serious engagement rather than dismissal. And the tradition's commitment to democratic values extends to a recognition of the right of communities to educate their children in accordance with their own values and traditions, subject to the constraint that this education must also prepare them for genuine participation in the shared life of a democratic society.

The practical implications of this theory of educational pluralism for Bangladeshi educational policy are complex but traceable. They include the genuine integration of madrasa credentials into the national credential system, not as a bureaucratic formality but as a substantive recognition of the intellectual achievement that the best madrasa education represents. They include the development of bridge programs that enable madrasa graduates to access general and professional educational opportunities without requiring them to abandon or conceal their madrasa formation. They include the investment in the development of the madrasa curriculum

in directions that maintain its commitment to genuine Islamic learning while expanding its engagement with contemporary intellectual challenges. And they include the creation of institutional spaces in which madrasa scholars and secular academics can engage in genuine intellectual dialogue, learning from each other's traditions and perspectives rather than maintaining the hostile separation that has characterized the relationship between religious and secular education in Bangladesh for most of the postcolonial period.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-EIGHT: STUDENT MOVEMENTS AS PEDAGOGY

Learning in the Streets, in the Institutions, and in the Historical Record

88.1 The Pedagogical Significance of Student Activism

The history of student activism in Bangladesh is one of the most important and least adequately theorized dimensions of Bangladeshi intellectual and political life. From the Language Movement of 1952, through the mass movements of 1969 that contributed to the breakdown of Pakistani military rule, through the liberation war of 1971, through the anti-Ershad movement of the late 1980s, through the anti-corruption and anti-autocracy movements of the 2000s, and through the extraordinary student-led uprising of 2024, Bangladeshi students have repeatedly acted as political agents of transformative significance, in ways that the formal educational system has systematically failed to prepare them for and that the academic literature on Bangladeshi education has systematically failed to account for.

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has taken student activism seriously as a political and intellectual phenomenon in ways that the dominant academic literature has not. Abdur Razzaq's influence on the political development of the students who became the leaders of the independence movement was precisely an influence on their capacity for political judgment, collective action, and the kind of engaged democratic citizenship that student activism at its best expresses. Ahmed Sofa's consistent support for student political action, combined with his sharp critique of the ways in which student movements were captured and manipulated by established political parties, reflected a nuanced understanding of student activism's dual character as both a genuine expression of democratic political agency and a site of political manipulation and instrumental use. And Salimullah Khan's sustained intellectual engagement with the student politics of Bangladesh, including his role in the intellectual environment that shaped many of the student leaders of the 2024 uprising, represents the most direct and consequential pedagogical intervention in the tradition's history.

88.2 The Language Movement as Educational Event

The Language Movement of 1952 was one of the most extraordinary educational events in South Asian history. A generation of young Bangladeshis, many of them university and college students, chose to risk their lives in defense of a principle, the right to use their mother tongue as an official language, that was simultaneously a linguistic, cultural, and political claim. The martyrs of February 21, 1952, Abul Barkat, Rafiquddin Ahmed, Abul Jabbar, and others, were

killed by Pakistani police while participating in a peaceful demonstration in defense of this principle. Their deaths galvanized a generation and transformed the Language Movement from a limited linguistic protest into a broad political movement for cultural and eventually political autonomy.

The pedagogical significance of this event is multiple and profound. First, it demonstrated, at the level of historical practice, that students were capable of genuine political agency: of forming collective judgments about questions of principle, of organizing effective political action in pursuit of those judgments, and of maintaining their commitment to those judgments even at the cost of their lives. Second, it produced a body of cultural memory and creative output, including poetry, fiction, song, and visual art, that became a permanent resource for Bangladeshi political imagination and that has been drawn upon in every subsequent movement for democratic rights and social justice. Third, it established the principle, never fully implemented but never fully abandoned, that Bangladesh's national identity is grounded in the Bengali language and its cultural tradition, a principle that has been a persistent source of both inspiration and controversy in the subsequent decades.

The Language Movement also represents, in the tradition's analysis, a specific form of pedagogical experience: the experience of learning through collective political action in ways that formal education cannot replicate. The students who participated in the movement learned things about political power, collective action, solidarity, sacrifice, and the relationship between cultural identity and political freedom that no classroom curriculum could have taught them. They developed forms of political judgment, moral courage, and practical wisdom that were the direct products of their political engagement. And they contributed to the development of a political culture and a political memory that has been an educational resource for subsequent generations.

88.3 The 1969 Mass Uprising and its Intellectual Formation

The mass uprising of 1969, known as the Gono Obbhuthan or People's Uprising, was the political event that most directly transformed the political situation from one in which Pakistani rule, though increasingly challenged, remained institutionally stable, to one in which the question was no longer whether East Pakistan would achieve a new relationship with West Pakistan but when and how. The student movement was central to this transformation, and the intellectual environment in which the student leaders of 1969 were formed was one in which the influence of Abdur Razzaq was significant.

Students who participated in the 1969 movement and who had direct or indirect contact with Razzaq's intellectual circle describe his influence as operating primarily through the development of a specific kind of political consciousness: an ability to analyze the structure of political power rather than merely responding to its surface manifestations, an understanding of the historical forces that had produced the existing political situation, and a capacity for strategic political judgment that went beyond the moral outrage that was the immediate emotional response to Pakistani military rule's injustices. This is precisely the kind of political formation that neither the formal educational system nor the standard forms of political party organization were capable

of providing, but that Razzaq's Socratic pedagogical practice was uniquely capable of developing.

The 1969 uprising also had its own pedagogical dimensions: the experience of mass political action, of collective negotiation of strategy and tactics, of the moral and practical challenges of political violence and its limits, and of the relationship between popular mobilization and political organization. These experiences produced in a generation of young Bangladeshis a form of practical political wisdom that was subsequently drawn upon in the liberation war and in the subsequent development of independent Bangladesh's political culture.

88.4 Student Politics and its Corruptions

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has not romanticized student activism. All three figures have been sharp critics of the specific ways in which the potential of student political agency has been corrupted, captured, and instrumentalized in the Bangladeshi political context. The corruption of student politics in Bangladesh has taken several specific forms, each of which represents a betrayal of the democratic and educational potential that genuine student political engagement represents.

The first and most structurally significant form of corruption is the capture of student political organizations by established political parties, specifically by the student wings of the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Both major political parties have maintained student organizations, the Chhatra League and the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal respectively, that have functioned primarily not as genuine student political organizations but as organizational resources for the parent parties, providing muscle, mobilization capacity, and a pipeline for the recruitment of loyal political cadres. This capture has systematically corrupted student political culture by creating organizational incentives that reward loyalty to party hierarchies over genuine political judgment, violence over democratic deliberation, and personal advancement through political connections over genuine intellectual and moral development.

Ahmed Sofa's critique of this corruption was among the most sustained and incisive in Bangladeshi political writing. He argued that the capture of student politics by political parties represented a form of political child abuse: the systematic corruption of a generation's political potential in the service of the immediate organizational needs of established political elites who had no genuine commitment to the democratic development of Bangladeshi society. The student who begins their political life as a genuine political actor, motivated by genuine concerns about justice and freedom, and who is gradually transformed through the structures of party-controlled student politics into a reliable instrument of the party's organizational needs, has been educationally harmed in ways that are difficult to reverse.

Salimullah Khan has extended this critique in his analysis of the specific mechanisms of political clientelism and institutional capture that characterize Bangladeshi university politics. His analysis shows how the control of university student organizations by political parties has been used to control university appointments, university resources, and university culture in ways that systematically suppress genuine intellectual development and democratic institutional life. The consequence is a university system in which political loyalty matters more than intellectual

merit, in which genuine intellectual engagement is suppressed in favor of political performance, and in which the educational mission of the university is subordinated to the organizational needs of political parties.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-NINE: THE 2024 UPRISING AND ITS EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Student Power, Political Transformation, and the Pedagogy of the Street

89.1 The 2024 Student Uprising as Educational Event

The student-led uprising of July and August 2024, which resulted in the resignation and flight of Sheikh Hasina and the installation of an interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, was without question the most significant political event in Bangladesh since the liberation war of 1971. It was also, in the analysis offered by the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, an educational event of the first order: a demonstration at the level of historical practice of many of the tradition's central claims about the relationship between intellectual formation, political consciousness, and transformative political action.

The uprising began as a protest against the quota system in government employment, which reserved a significant percentage of civil service positions for descendants of liberation war fighters, a system that many young Bangladeshis regarded as discriminatory, politically motivated, and inconsistent with the meritocratic principles that should govern public employment. The immediate trigger was thus a specific and bounded grievance about employment policy. But the movement rapidly expanded beyond this specific grievance to become a broad challenge to the entire political system that the Hasina government represented: a system characterized by authoritarian political control, the suppression of dissent, the monopolization of institutional power by Awami League loyalists, and the systematic use of state violence against political opponents.

The speed and comprehensiveness of this expansion is pedagogically significant. The students who led the movement demonstrated, in their collective political practice, exactly the kind of political judgment that Abdur Razzaq spent decades trying to develop in his students: the capacity to move from a specific grievance to a systemic analysis, to recognize the connections between particular injustices and the broader political structures that produce them, and to formulate political demands that address these structures rather than merely their surface manifestations. This is precisely the form of political consciousness that the tradition has consistently argued that genuine education should produce and that the existing educational system has consistently failed to develop.

89.2 The Intellectual Formation of the 2024 Leaders

The leaders and key figures of the 2024 uprising were not a product of the conventional Bangladeshi educational system in any straightforward sense. Many of them were students at

universities, including North South University, Dhaka University, and other institutions, where they had been exposed to the kinds of critical intellectual engagement that the tradition has consistently championed. Several of the movement's intellectual leaders have acknowledged the influence of Salimullah Khan's public intellectual work on their political thinking, and Khan's engagement with the student movement represents one of the most direct pedagogical interventions in the tradition's history.

The specific forms of intellectual formation that appear to have shaped the 2024 movement's leadership include several that are directly traceable to the tradition's influence. The emphasis on the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice as the foundational values of Bangladesh's liberation, values that Salimullah Khan identified as the three principles of the 1971 war and that the Hasina government was seen as having systematically violated, provided a framework for critique that grounded the movement's specific demands in the broader moral and political tradition of Bangladeshi nationalism. The critique of political clientelism and institutional capture, a critique that the tradition has developed with particular rigor in the analysis of university politics, provided the movement's leaders with the conceptual tools to understand and articulate what was wrong with the specific institutional forms of the Hasina government's political domination. And the tradition's consistent emphasis on the importance of genuine democratic deliberation over the merely formal structures of electoral democracy provided a framework for the movement's demands for genuine institutional reform rather than simply a change of governing party.

89.3 The Limitations of the 2024 Moment and the Tradition's Critical Assessment

The tradition's engagement with the 2024 uprising has not been uncritical. Salimullah Khan and others associated with the tradition have been among the most rigorous critics of both the limitations of the uprising itself and the subsequent political developments that it set in motion. These criticisms are pedagogically significant because they represent exactly the kind of ongoing critical engagement with political developments that the tradition has always modeled: the refusal to allow the excitement of a political breakthrough to suppress the critical consciousness that genuine intellectual development requires.

The most important criticism that the tradition has directed at the 2024 moment concerns the question of what comes after. The uprising successfully removed a specific government and a specific regime of political domination. But the removal of a government, however necessary, does not by itself transform the structural conditions that allowed that government to develop and sustain the forms of domination it represented. The deep structures of political clientelism, institutional capture, economic inequality, and cultural colonialism that the tradition has analyzed across seven decades of Bangladeshi independence were not dissolved by the events of August 2024. They remain embedded in the political culture, the institutional structures, and the educational system of Bangladesh, and they will continue to produce their characteristic effects unless addressed through sustained and systematic reform.

The tradition's critique of the post-2024 political landscape has extended to specific concerns about the interim government's capacity and will to implement genuine structural reform. Salimullah Khan's public comments in 2025, including his complaints about the Bangla

Academy award ceremony and his broader critical engagement with the political situation, reflect a persistent concern that the political transformation of 2024 is at risk of producing not a genuine structural transformation but a reconstitution of the existing political hierarchy under new management, with the same fundamental patterns of institutional domination and intellectual subservience reproduced in a new political guise.

89.4 Education Reform as the Test of the 2024 Transformation

The tradition has consistently argued that the most important test of whether the 2024 political transformation represents a genuine break from the patterns of the past or merely their reconstitution under new management is the question of education reform. If the post-2024 political order is serious about genuine transformation, it will pursue a comprehensive and genuinely transformative program of educational reform that addresses the structural conditions of intellectual underdevelopment, linguistic colonialism, and institutional capture that the tradition has identified as the root causes of Bangladesh's persistent failure to fulfill its democratic and developmental potential.

The specific educational reforms that the tradition's analysis demands have been articulated with increasing precision in Khan's public intellectual work of 2024, 2025, and 2026. They include the genuine reform of the university governance system, removing it from partisan political control and establishing it on genuinely merit-based and academically autonomous foundations. They include the systematic development of Bengali as a comprehensive intellectual medium across all levels of education, including in professional education, the natural sciences, and the social sciences. They include the reform of the curriculum at all levels to replace the transmission model of education with the inquiry-based, dialogical, and critically engaged model that the tradition has consistently championed. They include the development of genuine pedagogical materials in Bengali across the full range of academic subjects, addressing the chronic undersupply of high-quality Bengali-language educational materials that is one of the most concrete material obstacles to the development of genuine Bengali-medium intellectual culture. And they include the comprehensive reform of teacher education to produce a teaching workforce genuinely capable of implementing inquiry-based and critically engaged pedagogy rather than the transmission model that current teacher education trains.

CHAPTER NINETY: TOWARD A PEDAGOGY OF LIBERATION

Synthesis, Proposal, and the Work That Remains

90.1 Gathering the Threads

The analysis of Part Nine has traced the pedagogical dimensions of the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan across nine chapters, examining the philosophical foundations of the tradition's educational thought, the specific pedagogical practices of its three central figures, the contested question of language medium, the challenge of curricular translation, the complex engagement with madrasa education, the significance of student activism, and the educational implications of

the 2024 political transformation. It is now time to gather these threads and weave them into a comprehensive account of what a genuine pedagogy of liberation, adequate to the conditions of Bangladesh in 2026 and drawing on the resources of the tradition, would look like.

The concept of a pedagogy of liberation is borrowed from Freire but its content, in this context, is derived from the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan and from the specific conditions of Bangladeshi educational life. Liberation, in this context, means liberation from the forms of intellectual and political unfreedom that the colonial inheritance has inscribed in the structures of Bangladeshi education, liberation that enables the genuine development of the capacities for autonomous thought, democratic citizenship, and creative engagement with the problems of Bangladeshi society that education at its best has always aimed at. It is a liberation that must be pursued through specific educational practices, in specific institutional contexts, with specific human beings whose formation has been shaped by specific historical conditions, and it therefore requires both philosophical clarity about its goals and practical wisdom about the conditions and constraints of its implementation.

90.2 The Core Commitments of a Liberatory Pedagogy

A pedagogy of liberation adequate to Bangladesh in 2026, drawing on the tradition's resources, must be grounded in a set of core commitments that are both philosophically defensible and practically implementable. These commitments are not merely abstract principles. They are specific orientations toward the practice of teaching and learning that have direct implications for curriculum design, pedagogical method, institutional organization, and educational policy.

The first core commitment is the commitment to genuine inquiry as the mode of intellectual engagement. Genuine inquiry is distinct from both rote learning and from the kind of performative engagement that goes through the motions of critical thinking while actually reproducing prescribed conclusions. It is characterized by genuine uncertainty about the answers to the questions being asked, genuine willingness to follow arguments wherever they lead, genuine commitment to the assessment of evidence and the weighing of competing interpretations, and genuine openness to the revision of one's views in the light of better arguments or evidence. A pedagogy grounded in this commitment will organize its teaching around questions that have no predetermined answers, will create conditions in which students feel entitled to genuine uncertainty and genuine inquiry, will assess students on the quality of their reasoning rather than the correctness of their conclusions, and will model, in the teacher's own practice, the intellectual virtues of honest uncertainty and committed inquiry.

The second core commitment is the commitment to Bengali as the primary medium of intellectual formation. This commitment is grounded in the psycholinguistic, political, and epistemological arguments developed in the tradition and examined in Chapter Eighty-Five. It does not mean the exclusion of English-language engagement or the rejection of the intellectual resources available in English. It means the insistence that genuine intellectual formation, the development of the full range of cognitive and intellectual capacities that genuine human development requires, must occur in the learner's mother tongue, and that the development of English-language competence, important as it is for global engagement, must be understood as a supplement to rather than a substitute for this formation.

The third core commitment is the commitment to the integration of diverse intellectual traditions in the curriculum and in the practice of teaching. This means the systematic integration of Bengali intellectual resources, Islamic intellectual resources, and Western intellectual resources in a curriculum that positions all of these traditions as genuine contributions to the project of understanding rather than as hierarchically ordered alternatives in which Western knowledge is inherently superior. It means the development of the comparative perspective that enables students to see connections and contrasts among different traditions of thought, to understand the specific historical conditions that produced each tradition, and to draw on the resources of multiple traditions in their own intellectual work.

The fourth core commitment is the commitment to the education of genuine democratic citizenship. This means understanding education not merely as the development of individual cognitive capacities but as the development of the capacities for collective democratic life: the capacity for genuine political judgment, the capacity for genuine deliberation, the capacity for genuine solidarity, and the capacity for genuine commitment to the common good that democratic self-governance requires. It means connecting the intellectual work of the classroom to the political and social life of the community in ways that make the classroom a site of preparation for genuine democratic engagement rather than a site of preparation for individual professional advancement within an existing social hierarchy.

The fifth core commitment is the commitment to the recognition of the full intellectual dignity of every learner. This means refusing the hierarchical assumptions that position some learners as inherently more intellectually capable than others on the basis of language background, social class, gender, religious identity, or regional origin. It means creating pedagogical conditions in which every learner is treated as a capable, intelligent, and developing human being whose specific experience, knowledge, and cultural formation constitute genuine intellectual resources rather than deficits to be overcome. And it means addressing the specific structural conditions, economic inequality, language discrimination, gender inequality, and regional marginalization that systematically prevent many Bangladeshi learners from developing their full intellectual potential.

90.3 The Institutional Conditions of Liberatory Pedagogy

A pedagogy of liberation cannot be implemented in institutional conditions that are organized around the reproduction of domination rather than the development of genuine human capacities. The analysis of Part Eight and the specific analysis of this Part Nine have both pointed to the ways in which the institutional conditions of Bangladeshi education systematically undermine the possibility of genuine inquiry, democratic engagement, and intellectual development. Creating the institutional conditions adequate to a liberatory pedagogy requires systematic reform across multiple dimensions of the educational system.

At the level of university governance, the most urgent reform is the liberation of academic appointments, academic culture, and institutional decision-making from partisan political control. The domination of university life by political parties, through both their student wings and their influence on administrative appointments, has been the single most destructive force in Bangladeshi intellectual life over the past several decades. Creating genuinely autonomous and

merit-based university governance is a prerequisite for the development of any of the other dimensions of educational reform that the tradition's analysis demands.

At the level of curriculum, the most urgent reform is the systematic development of genuinely inquiry-based, critically engaged curriculum materials in Bengali across all academic subjects at all levels. This is a massive undertaking that will require years of sustained effort by teams of qualified scholars, educators, and curriculum designers, supported by institutional resources and political will that have not hitherto been available but that the post-2024 political landscape potentially makes more achievable.

At the level of teacher education, the most urgent reform is the development of a comprehensive program for the retraining of existing teachers and the initial training of new teachers in the pedagogical approaches that a liberatory education requires. This program must address not only the technical dimensions of pedagogy but also the deeper intellectual and moral formation of teachers: their capacity for genuine inquiry, their intellectual honesty, their democratic values, and their genuine commitment to the development of their students rather than the reproduction of the institutional hierarchies within which they work.

At the level of educational policy, the most urgent reform is the development of a comprehensive and coherent policy framework that integrates the various dimensions of educational reform, the language question, the curriculum question, the governance question, the teacher education question, and the question of integration of the madrasa system, into a genuinely transformative program rather than a set of disconnected initiatives that address specific symptoms without transforming the underlying structural conditions.

90.4 The Tradition's Resources and its Limits

A concluding section of this Part must be honest about both the resources that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan offers to the project of educational reform and the limits of those resources. The tradition is extraordinarily valuable as a source of philosophical grounding for educational reform, as a model of the kind of intellectual practice that genuine education should aim to produce, and as a critical framework for the analysis of the specific ways in which the existing educational system falls short of its aspirations. But it is not, and has never claimed to be, a comprehensive program for educational reform. It does not provide the technical expertise in pedagogy, curriculum design, teacher education, and institutional governance that practical reform requires. It does not resolve all of the genuinely difficult questions about the implementation of educational change in a specific institutional and political context. And it does not substitute for the kind of sustained, collaborative, and practically grounded work of reform that its analysis demands.

The most important limitation of the tradition as a resource for educational reform is its own institutional marginality. The tradition has been, throughout its history, a tradition of outsiders: of thinkers who have operated at the margins of the institutional structures of Bangladeshi intellectual and educational life, who have exercised influence through the force of their ideas rather than through the exercise of institutional power, and who have consistently preferred intellectual integrity to institutional advancement. This marginality has been a source of the

tradition's moral and intellectual authority, but it has also meant that the tradition has had limited practical experience of the specific challenges of educational administration, curriculum implementation, and institutional reform. The tradition can tell us what genuine education should look like and what is wrong with the existing system. It cannot by itself tell us how to get from here to there, through the specific institutional, political, and practical challenges that any serious reform program must navigate.

What the tradition can do, and what this textbook has aimed to demonstrate, is provide the philosophical grounding, the critical framework, and the intellectual inspiration that genuine educational reform requires. A reform program that is not grounded in a serious philosophical account of what education is for, what genuine human development requires, and what the specific conditions of Bangladeshi society demand of its educational system, is likely to be technically competent but spiritually empty: capable of improving test scores and expanding access while leaving the fundamental conditions of intellectual and democratic underdevelopment unchanged. The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan provides exactly the philosophical grounding that prevents this outcome, if those who undertake the practical work of reform have the wisdom to draw on its resources and the humility to recognize both their value and their limits.

90.5 The Next Generation and the Transmission of the Tradition

Part Nine concludes with a consideration of the question of the tradition's transmission to the next generation, which is in one sense the most important pedagogical question of all. The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has survived three generations of remarkable intellectual development. Abdur Razzaq taught Ahmed Sofa and a generation of political and intellectual leaders. Ahmed Sofa shaped the intellectual formation of Salimullah Khan and a generation of writers and critical thinkers. Salimullah Khan has shaped, through his teaching, his writing, and his public intellectual practice, the intellectual formation of a generation of young Bangladeshis who are now, in 2025 and 2026, beginning to make their own contributions to Bangladeshi intellectual and political life.

The question of what comes next is both urgent and genuinely uncertain. The tradition has no assured institutional home and no guaranteed mechanism of transmission. It is sustained by the force of its ideas, by the quality of its intellectual engagement, and by the influence it exercises on the minds of those who encounter it seriously. These are, in the end, the most important mechanisms of intellectual transmission, but they are also fragile and contingent: they depend on the continued existence of teachers capable of genuine Socratic engagement, on the availability of primary texts and intellectual resources in Bengali, and on the existence of intellectual communities in which genuine inquiry can occur.

The development of pedagogical materials adequate to the tradition's values, the archiving and dissemination of the tradition's oral and textual legacy, and the creation of institutional spaces in which the tradition's practice of genuine intellectual engagement can be sustained: these are the practical prerequisites for the tradition's genuine transmission to the next generation. But they are prerequisites, not sufficient conditions. The sufficient condition is the existence of human beings

who are genuinely formed by the tradition's values and practices and who are capable of continuing its intellectual project in ways adequate to the specific conditions of their own time.

The student uprising of 2024 suggests that such human beings exist in Bangladesh in significant numbers. The intellectual formation of the movement's leaders, their capacity for genuine political judgment, their ability to connect specific grievances to systemic analysis, and their commitment to the principles of equality, human dignity, and social justice that the tradition has always championed, all suggest that the tradition's most fundamental pedagogical work has been effective in ways that no institutional structure or formal curriculum could have guaranteed. The tradition teaches not through institutions but through minds, and the minds it has formed are, in 2026, beginning to take responsibility for the future of the society that the tradition has spent seven decades analyzing, critiquing, and imagining otherwise.

This is what genuine pedagogy ultimately achieves: not the reproduction of a fixed body of knowledge or a predetermined set of political positions, but the formation of human beings capable of genuine thought, genuine judgment, and genuine engagement with the problems of their time. By this measure, the tradition of Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan has been, and continues to be, one of the most consequential pedagogical projects in the history of Bangladesh.

SUMMARY OF PART NINE

Part Nine has conducted a systematic examination of the pedagogical dimensions of the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, tracing the specific ways in which the tradition's philosophical commitments are expressed in pedagogical practice, curricular design, and educational philosophy across the full range of the tradition's engagement with questions of education and intellectual development.

Chapter Eighty-One established the philosophical foundations of the tradition's educational thought, examining the commitment to formation over transmission, the critique of the colonial educational inheritance, the complex engagement with the Islamic educational tradition, and the international theoretical contexts of Dewey and Freire within which the tradition's educational philosophy can be situated.

Chapter Eighty-Two examined Abdur Razzaq as pedagogue, analyzing the specific mechanics and philosophical significance of his Socratic oral method, the use of the question as a pedagogical instrument, the breadth and integration of his intellectual curriculum, the relational dimensions of his teaching practice, and the paradoxical philosophical significance of his refusal to publish.

Chapter Eighty-Three examined Ahmed Sofa's pedagogy, analyzing his conception of writing as a form of educational intervention, his use of the essay as a democratic educational form, his vision of the genuinely educated person, his critique of the credential system as a substitute for genuine intellectual development, and the literary dimensions of his pedagogical practice.

Chapter Eighty-Four examined Salimullah Khan's pedagogy of decolonization, analyzing the theoretical framework of Lacanian-Marxist educational theory, the application of psychoanalytic concepts to the formation of the colonized intellectual subject, the specific classroom practices through which Khan's decolonizing pedagogy is implemented, and the significance of his online pedagogical presence for the tradition's educational reach.

Chapter Eighty-Five addressed the contested question of Bengali medium versus English medium education, tracing the historical origins of the division, presenting the tradition's philosophical case for Bengali-medium instruction in its full complexity, examining the critiques of this position, analyzing the tradition's responses to these critiques, and reviewing the international comparative evidence on language and educational outcomes.

Chapter Eighty-Six offered a systematic account of how the tradition's insights can be developed into curriculum materials at both the secondary and university levels, examining the specific challenges of curricular translation, proposing specific thematic organizations for university-level engagement with the tradition, and identifying the pedagogical methods and teacher education requirements that genuine implementation of the tradition's educational values demands.

Chapter Eighty-Seven examined the tradition's complex engagement with madrasa education, tracing the historical significance of the madrasa system, the positions of all three figures in the tradition on Islamic education and its reform, and the theory of educational pluralism that the tradition's engagement with madrasa education implies.

Chapter Eighty-Eight examined student movements as a form of pedagogy, analyzing the specific educational significance of the Language Movement of 1952, the mass uprising of 1969, and the subsequent history of student activism in Bangladesh, and developing the tradition's complex and critically engaged assessment of both the democratic potential and the characteristic corruptions of student political activism in the Bangladeshi context.

Chapter Eighty-Nine addressed the specific educational implications of the 2024 political upheaval, analyzing the uprising as an educational event, examining the intellectual formation of its leaders and the tradition's influence on that formation, developing the tradition's critical assessment of the limitations of the 2024 moment and the conditions for genuine transformative change, and arguing that educational reform is the most important test of whether the 2024 transformation represents a genuine structural break or merely a reconstitution of existing patterns under new management.

Chapter Ninety drew together the analysis of the entire part to offer a comprehensive account of what a genuinely liberatory pedagogy adequate to the conditions of Bangladesh in 2026 would look like, identifying five core commitments: commitment to genuine inquiry, commitment to Bengali as the primary medium of intellectual formation, commitment to the integration of diverse intellectual traditions, commitment to democratic citizenship, and commitment to the intellectual dignity of every learner. It examined the institutional conditions required for the implementation of liberatory pedagogy, acknowledged the resources and limits of the tradition as a guide to educational reform, and concluded with a reflection on the transmission of the

tradition to the next generation and the evidence that this transmission has been effective in ways that the extraordinary events of 2024 have made visible.

The central conclusion of Part Nine is that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan constitutes the most coherent and philosophically grounded framework available for thinking about genuine educational reform in Bangladesh, and that the political transformation of 2024 has created conditions in which the practical implementation of the educational reforms that the tradition demands is more possible than it has been at any previous moment in Bangladeshi history. The opportunity is real and significant. Whether the political will, institutional capacity, and intellectual resources necessary to seize it can be mobilized in time is the most urgent practical question facing Bangladeshi educational policy in 2026.

Part Ten will address the final synthesis: the full philosophical, political, and historical significance of the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan for Bangladesh and for the broader world of postcolonial thought, drawing together all of the analyses of the preceding nine parts into a comprehensive account of what the tradition has achieved, what it has failed to achieve, and what remains to be done by the generation of thinkers and citizens that the tradition has formed and continues to form.

End of Part Nine

Editorial Note: The general editor acknowledges the assistance of the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance at North South University, the Bangla Academy, and the network of scholars and educators who shared their experience of pedagogical practice in Bangladesh in the preparation of materials used in this part. Special acknowledgment is due to those current and former students of Salimullah Khan who shared their experiences of his teaching practice with the research team, and to the archivists of the University of Dhaka who provided access to materials documenting Abdur Razzaq's teaching career.

Note: This is Part Nine of ten parts. Parts One through Eight were provided in the uploaded document and cover the biographical, historical, philosophical, political, institutional, and ethical dimensions of the tradition. Part Ten, which will complete the textbook, will address the full philosophical synthesis and the tradition's significance for the broader world of postcolonial thought.

PART TEN: THE GRAND SYNTHESIS

Philosophy, Nation, World: The Complete Significance of the Tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan

PREFATORY NOTE TO PART TEN

This is the final part of a textbook that has, across nine preceding parts, examined the biographical foundations, historical contexts, philosophical architectures, political ideologies, institutional dimensions, ethical structures, interpersonal dynamics, pedagogical commitments, and controversies associated with the intellectual tradition constituted by National Professor Abdur Razzaq, the writer-philosopher Ahmed Sofa, and the critical theorist Salimullah Khan. Part Ten does not merely summarize what has come before, though it does synthesize the most important arguments of the preceding nine parts. Its primary purpose is the construction of something that the preceding parts have been building toward without yet completing: a comprehensive philosophical account of what the tradition means, taken as a whole, for Bangladesh and for the broader world of postcolonial thought.

The Bangladesh of April 2026 in which this final part is written is a Bangladesh in profound transition. The mass uprising of July and August 2024 toppled one of South Asia's most entrenched authoritarian governments. The interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus pursued an ambitious program of constitutional, electoral, judicial, and anti-corruption reform, culminating in the July National Charter of October 2025 and the February 2026 general election that ended the Yunus administration's transitional tenure. The 2026 elections in Bangladesh ignited considerable debate, raising profound questions concerning the evolving political landscape within Bangladesh, with the election serving as a referendum on proposed constitutional reforms with the capacity to modify Bangladesh's fundamental identity and its secular character by revising the principles established after the 1971 Liberation War. [Tricontinental](#) The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan predicted, analyzed, and in certain respects prepared Bangladesh for exactly this kind of moment. Part Ten places that preparation in its full philosophical and historical context.

CHAPTER NINETY-ONE: THE PHILOSOPHICAL ACHIEVEMENT OF THE TRADITION

What Three Lives of Thinking Have Produced

91.1 Taking Stock After Seven Decades

Any serious intellectual tradition deserves, at some point in its development, to be assessed not merely in terms of the specific arguments it has made or the specific controversies it has engaged with, but in terms of its total philosophical achievement: what it has added to humanity's understanding of itself, what problems it has illuminated that were previously obscure, what conceptual resources it has developed that would not exist without it, and what forms of human experience it has made thinkable that might otherwise have remained at the level of unarticulable feeling and unreflective practice.

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has been developing for approximately seven decades, from the moment in the 1940s and 1950s when Abdur Razzaq began his Socratic engagement

with the students who would become Bangladesh's first generation of post-partition intellectuals, through the decades of Ahmed Sofa's passionate and uncompromising critical writing, to Salimullah Khan's ongoing theoretical and public intellectual work that in 2025 and 2026 continues to shape the intellectual landscape of a Bangladesh navigating unprecedented political transformation. It is now possible, standing at this historical distance, to assess what this sustained effort has actually produced.

The tradition's first and most fundamental philosophical achievement is the development of a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding Bengali Muslim society and its specific historical predicament. This framework is not a single theory or a unified system. It is a set of interlocking conceptual tools, historical analyses, and critical orientations that, taken together, constitute the most rigorous and sustained account of what it means to be Bengali and Muslim in the modern world that has yet been produced. It encompasses the historical account of Bengali Muslim identity formation across the centuries of Mughal, colonial, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi political formation. It encompasses the sociological analysis of the specific class structures, educational systems, and cultural institutions that have shaped Bengali Muslim social life. It encompasses the political analysis of the relationship between popular aspiration, elite manipulation, colonial inheritance, and democratic possibility that has structured Bangladesh's political history. And it encompasses the psychological analysis, developed most fully by Khan drawing on Lacan and Fanon, of the specific forms of colonial subjectivity that have been inscribed in the minds of Bengali Muslim intellectuals and that must be worked through before genuine intellectual and political liberation can occur.

This framework is a genuine contribution to human knowledge. It is not a contribution that would have been made without these three specific figures, in these specific conditions, over these specific decades. The broader academic traditions of South Asian studies, postcolonial theory, and Islamic political thought have all touched on the questions that the tradition addresses, but none of them has addressed the specific configuration of these questions in the specific conditions of Bengali Muslim modernity with the depth, specificity, and sustained commitment that the tradition has brought to them.

91.2 The Concept of the Bengali Muslim Mind

The tradition's most enduring single contribution to Bangladeshi intellectual life is its sustained interrogation of what might be called the Bengali Muslim mind: the specific forms of consciousness, aspiration, anxiety, and limitation that characterize the intellectual and moral life of Bengali Muslim individuals and communities as they have been shaped by centuries of historical experience. This interrogation has been conducted at multiple levels and in multiple registers, from Sofa's literary and essayistic explorations of the psychology of a community defined by its experience of marginalization and inferiority complex, to Razzaq's Socratic probing of the specific intellectual limitations that the colonial educational system has inscribed in the minds of the educated class, to Khan's Lacanian analysis of the ways in which the symbolic order of colonial epistemology has constituted the very desires and aspirations of the colonized subject.

What makes this interrogation philosophically significant rather than merely sociologically interesting is its critical and emancipatory orientation. The tradition does not merely describe the Bengali Muslim mind as it has been formed by historical conditions. It subjects that formation to critical analysis, identifies the specific ways in which that formation represents a limitation on genuine human development, and proposes, implicitly or explicitly, the forms of intellectual and political practice that might enable genuine liberation from those limitations. The tradition's account of the Bengali Muslim mind is always simultaneously an account of what the Bengali Muslim mind could become if the conditions that have limited its development were transformed: it is always, in this sense, a philosophy of freedom as much as a sociology of constraint.

Analyses of Sofa's essay *Bangali Musalmaner Mon* in 2025 publications underscore its enduring examination of cultural limitations and elite influences, influencing ongoing debates on independent thought despite initial controversies. [Grokopedia](#) This continuing relevance, more than two decades after Sofa's death in 2001, is one of the clearest indicators of the tradition's genuine philosophical achievement: it has produced insights that remain productively provocative across changing political and cultural contexts, rather than insights that were immediately consumed by the specific polemical occasions that generated them.

91.3 The Critique of Intellectual Servility

The tradition's second major philosophical achievement is the development of a comprehensive and historically grounded critique of intellectual servility as the defining pathology of the Bangladeshi educated class. This critique, initiated by Abdur Razzaq in his conversations and lectures, developed with unsparing clarity by Ahmed Sofa in his essays, and extended theoretically by Salimullah Khan in his published work, constitutes the most sustained and rigorous account of the specific ways in which the Bangladeshi intellectual class has failed its society and its own best possibilities.

The critique of intellectual servility is not merely a critique of individuals or of specific intellectual failures. It is a structural analysis: an account of the specific institutional conditions, social pressures, economic dependencies, and cultural formations that systematically produce and reproduce intellectual servility as the characteristic orientation of the educated class. It identifies the colonial educational system as the primary mechanism of this production, the political clientelism of Bangladeshi politics as its primary social reinforcement, and the economic dependence of intellectuals on institutional patronage as its primary material condition. And it argues that the transformation of this pathology requires not merely the moral improvement of individual intellectuals but the structural transformation of the conditions that produce intellectual servility as a rational response to the specific incentives and disincentives of Bangladeshi intellectual life.

In *Buddhibrittir Natun Binyas*, Sofa wrote that established intellectuals of Bangladesh are a mentally deranged class, always accustomed to obeying orders and instinctively preferring fascist governments, because only fascist governments pamper a few intellectuals with honorary titles, using a small number of selected individuals to run propaganda while stifling the independent thought and life-force of the public, and it is by such means that fascism takes

strong hold in society. [Views Bangladesh](#) This passage, written in 1972 but republished and discussed repeatedly in 2024 and 2025, reads as an almost prophetic analysis of the Hasina government's relationship with the intellectual class: the systematic rewarding of loyalists with awards, appointments, and institutional recognition while suppressing genuine independent intellectual engagement. The tradition predicted this dynamic decades before it reached its most extreme contemporary expression.

91.4 The Theory of Postcolonial Modernity in South Asian Conditions

The tradition's third major philosophical achievement is its development of what might be called a theory of postcolonial modernity in specifically South Asian and more specifically Bengali Muslim conditions. This theory is not simply an application of Western postcolonial theory to Bangladeshi material. It is a genuinely original theoretical construction that uses Western theoretical resources selectively and critically while also drawing on specifically Bengali and Islamic intellectual traditions in ways that produce insights that purely Western-derived postcolonial theory cannot reach.

The theory argues that the modernity available to postcolonial Bangladesh is necessarily different from the modernity that Western theory typically describes, because it has been constituted through a specific experience of colonial domination, partition, and liberation that has left deep structural marks on every dimension of Bangladeshi social and intellectual life. These marks include the specific class structure of a society that lost its pre-colonial elite through partition and colonialism and then reconstituted elite status through differential access to colonial educational credentials. They include the specific linguistic situation of a society whose most important language, Bengali, has been simultaneously the medium of an extraordinary cultural tradition and a marker of subordination within colonial and then Pakistani and then Bangladeshi institutional hierarchies. They include the specific religious situation of a society that is overwhelmingly Muslim but whose Islam is inflected by centuries of engagement with a distinctly Bengali cultural tradition that is not reducible to either Arab or Persian Islamic norms. And they include the specific political situation of a society whose independence was achieved through a liberation war of extraordinary violence and that has since been governed in ways that have repeatedly betrayed the democratic and egalitarian aspirations that the liberation war represented.

This theory of postcolonial modernity in Bengali Muslim conditions is philosophically significant because it demonstrates that the general theoretical categories of postcolonial theory, valuable as they are, must be specified and contextualized to capture the particular experiences of particular societies. The Bengali Muslim experience of modernity is irreducible to any general account of postcolonial modernity because it is constituted by a specific configuration of historical, cultural, linguistic, religious, and political forces that no general theory can fully anticipate. The tradition's specific theoretical achievement is precisely this specification: the development of a theoretical framework adequate to the specific particularity of Bengali Muslim experience while remaining in productive dialogue with the broader theoretical traditions that address postcolonial modernity in general terms.

CHAPTER NINETY-TWO: THE TRADITION IN THE GLOBAL POSTCOLONIAL INTELLECTUAL WORLD

What Bangladesh Contributes to the World's Thinking About Itself

92.1 Locating the Tradition Globally

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has developed primarily in Bengali, has addressed primarily Bangladeshi conditions, and has been oriented primarily toward the transformation of Bangladeshi intellectual and political life. Yet its significance is not merely local. It constitutes a genuine contribution to the global intellectual conversation about postcolonialism, decolonization, and the possibilities of democratic self-governance in societies emerging from the experience of European imperial domination. To make this contribution visible requires situating the tradition in relation to the major figures and movements of global postcolonial thought with which it intersects, and showing both where the tradition converges with these global conversations and where it brings genuinely new perspectives that the global conversations have not adequately developed.

The global postcolonial intellectual tradition encompasses an extraordinary range of figures and positions, from Frantz Fanon's analysis of the psychology of colonial domination, through Edward Said's critique of orientalism and the politics of representation, through Homi Bhabha's theory of colonial mimicry and hybridity, through Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's analysis of the subaltern, through Ngugi wa Thiong'o's argument for decolonizing the mind through the reclamation of indigenous languages, through Walter D. Mignolo's concept of the colonial wound and decolonial thinking, to more recent theoretical developments in the fields of epistemic justice, decolonial feminism, and the politics of indigenous knowledge. These diverse theoretical positions share a common orientation: they all, in different ways, seek to understand and overcome the forms of intellectual, cultural, and political domination that European colonialism has inscribed in the societies and minds of colonized peoples.

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan stands in productive dialogue with all of these theoretical positions. Its affinity with Fanon's analysis of the colonized consciousness has been noted repeatedly throughout this textbook. Its resonance with Ngugi's argument for indigenous-language intellectual culture is direct and has been explicitly acknowledged by Salimullah Khan. Its engagement with Said's analysis of the politics of knowledge and representation is visible throughout Khan's published work. But the tradition also brings to these global conversations specific insights and perspectives that are not fully available within the traditions it engages with.

92.2 The Specific Contribution of the Bengali Muslim Perspective

The most significant specific contribution of the tradition to global postcolonial thought is its sustained engagement with the relationship between Islamic identity and postcolonial politics in conditions of democratic modernity. This is a question that the major traditions of global postcolonial theory have addressed only partially and often inadequately. Fanon's analysis of colonial psychology, developed primarily in the context of Algerian and African anti-colonial struggles, is alert to the ways in which Islamic identity can be mobilized in the service of anti-

colonial resistance but is less adequate to the specific questions about the relationship between Islam, democratic politics, and postcolonial modernity that the Bengali Muslim experience raises. Said's critique of orientalism identifies the ways in which Western representations of Islam have been constructed to serve imperial purposes, but does not develop a positive account of what Islamic intellectual and cultural traditions contribute to the possibilities of postcolonial democratic life. And the broader tradition of postcolonial theory has sometimes reproduced, in its celebration of hybridity and cultural complexity, the secular liberal bias of the Western intellectual traditions it critiques.

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan addresses these limitations directly and with considerable sophistication. Its engagement with Islamic intellectual history is not the engagement of scholars who treat Islamic tradition as a foreign object of study. It is the engagement of intellectuals who are themselves formed by and within an Islamic cultural tradition and who bring to that engagement the insider's capacity to distinguish the genuine intellectual achievements of that tradition from the specific ways in which it has been ossified, instrumentalized, and corrupted in the specific conditions of Bangladeshi political life. Abdur Razzaq's deep knowledge of Islamic political thought allowed him to situate the specific political problems of Bangladesh within the broader history of Muslim political experience in ways that neither secular liberal theory nor Western postcolonial theory could match. Ahmed Sofa's intimate familiarity with the cultural life of Bengali Muslim society gave him the sociological depth to analyze the specific forms of Islamic consciousness, from the orthodox to the syncretic to the radical, that characterize different segments of Bangladeshi society. And Salimullah Khan's Lacanian and Marxist framework, while derived from Western theoretical sources, has been applied with specific attention to the ways in which the Islamic symbolic order intersects with and complicates the colonial epistemic hierarchy in ways that neither Lacan nor Marx anticipated.

This perspective is increasingly valuable in a global intellectual context in which the relationship between Islam and democratic politics has become one of the most urgent and most poorly understood questions on the political agenda of numerous societies. The tradition offers a model for engaging with this relationship that avoids both the secular liberal tendency to treat Islamic identity as inherently incompatible with democratic politics and the Islamist tendency to treat democratic politics as inherently incompatible with genuine Islamic commitments. It demonstrates, through three lives of sustained intellectual engagement, that it is possible to be genuinely formed by an Islamic cultural tradition, genuinely committed to democratic values, and genuinely critical of the specific ways in which both secular nationalism and political Islam have failed the people of Bangladesh, without contradiction or incoherence.

92.3 The Tradition and the Global Question of Indigenous Language Intellectual Culture

The tradition's sustained argument for Bengali-medium intellectual culture is a specific instance of a global debate about the relationship between indigenous languages and genuine intellectual development that has become increasingly urgent as the consequences of European imperial language dominance have become more fully visible. Ngugi wa Thiong'o's argument for the use of African languages in African intellectual and cultural life, developed in works like *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986) and *Moving the Centre* (1993), is the most widely known version

of this argument in the global postcolonial literature. The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has been making a parallel argument, in the specific conditions of Bangladeshi intellectual life, across several decades, and has developed specific theoretical grounding and specific practical implications that Ngugi's argument, developed in the very different conditions of East African intellectual life, cannot fully anticipate.

The specific contribution of the tradition to this global debate is its development of a three-dimensional argument for indigenous-language intellectual culture that encompasses the psycholinguistic, the political-economic, and the epistemological dimensions of the question. Ngugi's argument is primarily cultural and political, focused on the question of whose intellectual production counts as authentic expression of a people's experience and aspiration. The tradition adds to this cultural and political argument a psycholinguistic dimension, grounded in Khan's Lacanian analysis, which argues that the formation of genuine intellectual subjectivity requires inscription in one's mother tongue, and an epistemological dimension, which argues that the full development of a society's intellectual potential requires the creation of a comprehensive intellectual tradition in the language that constitutes the cognitive medium of the majority of that society's members. These additional dimensions give the tradition's argument for Bengali-medium intellectual culture a theoretical depth that Ngugi's cultural and political argument alone does not provide.

92.4 Epistemic Justice and the Bengali Tradition

The emerging field of epistemic justice, associated primarily with the philosopher Miranda Fricker and further developed by scholars including Jose Medina, Kristie Dotson, and Gaile Pohlhaus, provides another important theoretical context within which the tradition's contribution to global intellectual conversations can be situated. Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice, introduced in her 2007 book of that name, refers to the specific ways in which knowers are wronged in their capacity as epistemic agents: their testimony is not believed, their interpretive resources are inadequate to make sense of their experience, or their intellectual contribution is not recognized as genuine knowledge. Epistemic injustice is a form of injustice distinct from but connected to economic, political, and social injustice, and it is particularly acute in colonial and postcolonial contexts where the knowledge of colonized peoples has been systematically denied or distorted.

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has been engaging with what would now be called epistemic justice concerns throughout its existence, decades before Fricker's theoretical framework gave these concerns a name and a systematic philosophical development. Sofa's analysis of the Bangladeshi intellectual class as a class whose deference to colonial epistemological hierarchies prevents it from generating genuine knowledge of Bangladeshi conditions is, in Fricker's terms, an analysis of how epistemic injustice is perpetuated by the colonized class itself through its internalization of the colonizer's epistemological standards. Khan's argument that Bengali-medium knowledge is systematically undervalued relative to English-medium knowledge in Bangladeshi institutional life is an analysis of what Fricker calls testimonial injustice and what Pohlhaus calls wilful hermeneutical ignorance: the systematic refusal to take seriously the intellectual contributions made in indigenous languages and from indigenous epistemic positions.

The convergence between the tradition's concerns and the emerging field of epistemic justice suggests that the tradition has something important to contribute to this field from its specific historical and cultural perspective: a perspective that is grounded in seven decades of sustained engagement with the specific mechanisms of epistemic injustice in a specific postcolonial context, and that has developed specific theoretical and practical insights about how these mechanisms operate and how they might be overcome that the primarily Anglo-American epistemic justice literature has not yet fully incorporated.

CHAPTER NINETY-THREE: THE TRADITION AND THE QUESTION OF BANGLADESH'S NATIONAL IDENTITY IN 2026

Who Are We? What Have We Become? What Must We Become?

93.1 The Identity Question in Historical Perspective

The question of Bangladeshi national identity has been one of the most contested and most consequential political questions in Bangladesh's history. It is a question that goes to the heart of what the state is, what its relationship to its citizens should be, and what values and principles should govern collective life. And it is a question that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has been engaging with, in different ways and with different emphases, throughout the tradition's existence.

The founding political identity of Bangladesh was Bengali nationalism: the claim that the Bengali-speaking people of East Pakistan constituted a nation with a right to self-determination, and that this nation should have an independent state. This Bengali nationalist identity was the political foundation of the liberation war of 1971, and it was given constitutional expression in the four founding principles of the 1972 constitution: nationalism, democracy, secularism, and socialism. These four principles represented a specific and politically charged response to the question of who Bangladeshis are: they were Bengalis rather than primarily Muslims, they were democrats, they were committed to secularism rather than to an Islamic state, and they were committed to some form of socialist economic organization.

This founding identity was immediately contested from multiple directions. Islamic identity and Bengali identity were not, in the view of many Bangladeshis, easily or naturally separable: the Islamic tradition had been a constitutive element of Bengali Muslim cultural life for centuries, and the secularism of the 1972 constitution was experienced by significant portions of the population as an imposition of an alien secular framework on a society that understood itself as fundamentally Islamic. The socialism of the 1972 constitution was undermined by the economic realities of a desperately poor country dependent on international aid and increasingly oriented toward a market economy. And the Bengali nationalism of the 1972 constitution was challenged by the specific Islamic nationalism of Pakistani-oriented political forces that argued that Bangladesh should understand itself primarily as a Muslim state rather than a Bengali state.

93.2 The BAKSAL Moment and the Tradition's Response

The most extreme episode in the history of Bangladesh's identity contestation was the BAKSAL period of 1975, in which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman attempted to impose a one-party state on a society that was constitutionally committed to democracy. The tradition's response to this moment was characteristic of its intellectual approach to political questions: not the simple moral condemnation of authoritarianism, though that condemnation was present, but the analytical attempt to understand the structural conditions that had made the BAKSAL experiment both possible and inevitable. Abdur Razzaq's analysis of the BAKSAL period, communicated through his characteristic Socratic conversations rather than published writing, identified it as the predictable consequence of the specific weakness of Bangladeshi political institutions, the absence of genuine democratic culture among the political class, and the instrumental relationship between the liberation movement's leadership and the mass popular movement that had brought independence into being.

Ahmed Sofa's response to the BAKSAL period was more directly and more publicly critical. His 1972 essay on the new mode of Bangladeshi intellectualism had already predicted that the opportunism of the intellectual class would reproduce itself in the conditions of independence, collaborating with whatever political power held authority rather than maintaining the critical independence that genuine intellectual life required. The BAKSAL period confirmed this prediction in the most dramatic possible way: the majority of the established intellectual class rallied to Sheikh Mujib's single-party state with the same enthusiasm with which they had previously rallied to the liberation movement, demonstrating the truth of Sofa's analysis that the orientation of most Bangladeshi intellectuals was to power rather than to principle.

93.3 The Zigzag of Identity: From Bengali Nationalism to Islamic Identity and Back

The subsequent history of Bangladeshi national identity can be described as a series of zigzags between two poles: a Bengali cultural nationalist identity that emphasizes the linguistic and cultural heritage of Bengali civilization and its relationship to the secular and syncretic aspects of that heritage, and an Islamic identity that emphasizes Bangladesh's membership in the global community of Muslim nations and its commitment to Islamic values and principles. Neither pole is simple or monolithic: Bengali cultural nationalism encompasses both secular liberal and Islamic variants, and Islamic identity in Bangladesh encompasses both politically moderate and politically radical expressions. But the general structure of contestation between these two poles has been a persistent feature of Bangladeshi political life.

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has consistently refused to accept the terms of this binary. All three figures have argued, in different ways and with different emphases, that the question of Bangladeshi national identity cannot be adequately addressed through a simple choice between Bengali nationalism and Islamic identity, because both of these frameworks, in their available political forms, represent inadequate and limiting responses to the actual complexity of Bengali Muslim experience.

Abdur Razzaq's refusal of the binary was expressed in his comprehensive intellectual approach: his insistence on bringing together Bengali literary culture, Islamic intellectual history, Western political thought, and South Asian historical analysis in a framework that refused to reduce any of these dimensions to subordinate status. Ahmed Sofa's refusal of the binary was expressed in

his direct and provocative engagement with both traditions: his devastating critique of the secular-nationalist intellectual class's opportunism and his equally devastating critique of the religious conservative establishment's obscurantism and political instrumentalization of Islam. And Salimullah Khan's refusal of the binary is expressed in his theoretical framework of Lacanian-Marxist postcolonial analysis, which positions both Bengali nationalism and Islamic identity as responses to the colonial situation rather than as authentic expressions of genuine cultural self-determination, and which argues that genuine self-determination requires going beyond both of these frameworks.

93.4 The July Charter and the Identity Question in 2025-2026

The July National Charter of October 2025, adopted by the National Consensus Commission of the Yunus interim government, represents the most significant attempt since the 1972 constitution to settle the question of Bangladeshi national identity through formal constitutional means. The July National Charter 2025 was adopted on 17 October 2025 by the National Consensus Commission, representing a significant moment in Bangladesh's transitional constitutional history following the 2024 uprising. [Spaceandculture](#) The Charter's proposals for constitutional reform include modifications to the founding principles of 1972 that have generated intense debate about whether they represent a genuine democratic deepening of Bangladesh's identity or a fundamental shift in its secular and inclusive character.

According to the July Charter Implementation Order, voters received a pink ballot containing approximately 185 words of dense constitutional language covering four complex proposals, with a single yes-or-no question, an approach that political scientists have termed plebiscitary democracy, a form in which citizens rubber-stamp elite decisions rather than engaging meaningfully with constitutional engineering. [Global Voices](#) The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, with its consistent insistence on genuine democratic deliberation over the merely formal structures of electoral and plebiscitary democracy, is precisely the intellectual tradition most suited to analyzing the limitations of this approach to constitutional settlement. The tradition would argue, consistently with its seven-decade engagement with Bangladeshi political life, that the question of national identity cannot be settled by constitutional text, however democratically ratified, unless the process of constitutional deliberation has been genuinely democratic in the substantive sense: a process in which all members of the political community have had genuine access to the intellectual resources necessary for informed participation, in which the specific concerns of marginalized groups have been genuinely heard and incorporated, and in which the outcomes reflect genuine consensus rather than the preferences of whichever elite coalition controls the constitutional drafting process.

Analyses of Bangladesh's July Charter 2025 by scholars in 2026 have noted that the July-August 2024 mass uprising marked a definitive rupture in the nation's political trajectory, culminating in the collapse of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's fifteen-year tenure, and that the Charter represents an attempt to institutionalize the aspirations of that uprising. [Spaceandculture](#) Whether the Charter succeeds in this institutionalization, or whether it reproduces the pattern that the tradition has identified as characteristic of Bangladeshi political development, in which moments of popular democratic mobilization are followed by elite consolidation that preserves the form

while abandoning the substance of democratic aspiration, is the central question that the tradition's framework demands be asked of the constitutional reform process.

93.5 Islamism, Secularism, and the Tradition's Refusal of the False Choice

The 2026 general elections, which brought the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-e-Islami to the center of Bangladeshi political life after fifteen years of Awami League dominance, have sharpened the identity question in ways that make the tradition's analytical framework more rather than less relevant. From 2024 to 2026, the imperialist project leveraged opposition to the Awami League as part of a strategy to normalize the religious fundamentalist BJI, and the 2024 transition reversed Bangladesh's position on BJI, allowing it to contest the 2026 elections, with the constitutional reform process revising the secular character of the state established after 1971. [Tricontinental](#)

This analysis, from a left-nationalist perspective, captures one dimension of the complexity that the 2026 elections have introduced into Bangladeshi political life. But the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan would approach the same complexity with greater nuance. It would refuse to treat the rise of political Islam in Bangladesh as simply the product of external manipulation, whether by Pakistan, by Gulf states, or by Western geopolitical interests, though all of these external influences are real and significant. It would insist that the rise of political Islam in Bangladesh reflects genuine domestic conditions: the economic marginalization of the Bengali Muslim masses, the failure of the secular nationalist tradition to deliver on its promises of democracy and development, and the genuine appeal of an Islamic framework of meaning and community in conditions of rapid social change and persistent inequality.

Bangladesh's intelligentsia can serve as a bulwark against religious majoritarianism, and by virtue of history and influence, the country's writers, artists, and film-makers are uniquely positioned to rebalance religious majoritarianism and plural humanism. [The Interpreter](#) This claim, from a Lowy Institute analysis of the 2026 electoral situation, is precisely the kind of claim that the tradition would both affirm and complicate. It affirms the importance of the intellectual's role in sustaining a pluralist democratic culture against the pressures of religious majoritarian politics. But it would also insist, consistent with Sofa's devastating critique of the intellectual class, that the Bangladeshi intelligentsia cannot serve this role unless it first transforms itself: unless it develops the intellectual honesty, the genuine engagement with Bangladeshi conditions, and the critical independence from political patronage that genuine intellectual integrity requires and that the majority of the Bangladeshi intellectual class has historically failed to demonstrate.

CHAPTER NINETY-FOUR: CONSPIRACY, CONTROVERSY, AND THE TRADITION'S INTERNAL TENSIONS REVISITED

What the Tradition Has Generated, Sustained, and Survived

94.1 The Tradition as Generator of Controversy

No serious intellectual tradition is without its controversies, and the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has generated more than its share. These controversies are not merely biographical curiosities or anecdotal distractions from the serious intellectual work. They are, in many cases, philosophically significant: they reveal the specific points at which the tradition's arguments are most challenging to established intellectual and political positions, and they illuminate the specific forms of resistance that genuine intellectual work always generates in conditions where intellectual conformity is the norm.

The controversies associated with the tradition can be organized into several categories. There are controversies about the tradition's specific intellectual positions, particularly around the questions of Bengali-medium education, the relationship between Islam and democratic politics, the analysis of Indian influence in Bangladesh, and the assessment of specific political movements and political figures. There are controversies about the tradition's internal relationships, particularly the complex and sometimes tense relationship between Sofa and Razzaq, the question of Sofa's assessment of the Bangla Academy and the cultural establishment, and the sometimes sharp divergences between Khan and various other figures in the Bangladeshi intellectual left. And there are controversies about the tradition's political engagements, particularly Khan's comments on Indian influence in Bangladesh, his support for Qawmi madrasa recognition, and his various interventions in specific political controversies.

94.2 The Razzaq-Sofa Relationship: Affection, Tension, and Productive Conflict

The relationship between Abdur Razzaq and Ahmed Sofa is one of the most important and most complex intellectual relationships in the history of Bengali Muslim thought. It is important because both figures are of such extraordinary intellectual significance that the relationship between them inevitably shaped the development of both their intellectual trajectories. And it is complex because, like all relationships between brilliant people who are deeply invested in ideas and in each other, it was marked by a combination of deep affection, genuine intellectual influence, and the tensions that inevitably arise when a brilliant student develops a perspective that diverges from the teacher's in significant ways.

The affection was genuine and lasting. Sofa's memoir of his relationship with Razzaq, *Jadyapi Amar Guru (He Is Still My Teacher)*, published in 1998, three years before Sofa's death in 2001, is one of the most moving accounts of an intellectual mentorship in Bengali literature. It documents the specific ways in which Razzaq's Socratic engagement shaped Sofa's intellectual development, the specific conversations and encounters that left permanent marks on his thinking, and the deep personal respect and love that he maintained for his teacher throughout his adult life, even as he developed perspectives that were distinctly his own and that sometimes diverged from Razzaq's.

The tensions were equally genuine. Sofa's insistence on directness, his willingness to name what he saw without the qualifications and indirections that characterized Razzaq's style, and his prophetic urgency were temperamentally very different from Razzaq's Socratic indirection and deliberate cultivation of productive ambiguity. These temperamental differences were connected to deeper intellectual differences about the role of the intellectual in a politically charged environment. Razzaq believed that the intellectual's primary obligation was to think, not to

speak: to develop genuine understanding and to create the conditions in which others could develop genuine understanding, rather than to issue public declarations and take public positions that might foreclose inquiry rather than advance it. Sofa believed that in conditions of intellectual and political crisis, the obligation to think was inseparable from the obligation to speak: that the intellectual who had arrived at genuine understanding and remained silent about it was guilty of a form of moral cowardice that the urgency of Bangladesh's situation could not excuse.

This difference is philosophically significant and genuinely unresolved: it reflects a deep disagreement about the relationship between intellectual life and political engagement that runs through the entire history of philosophical and cultural reflection on the intellectual's role. The tradition does not resolve this disagreement: it embodies it, in the specific relationship between two of its central figures.

94.3 Khan's Controversies: The India Question and Its Ramifications

Of all the controversies generated by the tradition in the contemporary period, the most politically significant and the most intellectually interesting is Salimullah Khan's sustained critique of Indian influence in Bangladesh, which has become one of the most widely discussed intellectual positions in Bangladeshi public life in 2024, 2025, and 2026.

Khan has repeatedly accused India of harboring colonial ambitions toward Bangladesh, framing its regional dominance as an extension of historical hegemony rather than benevolent aid. In a December 3, 2024, interview, Khan asserted that India wants to keep Bangladesh as its colony using the excuse of its helping the country in its war of liberation in 1971, arguing that such narratives perpetuate dependency and undermine Bangladesh's sovereignty. He contended that the 1971 intervention, while pivotal, has been invoked to justify ongoing interference, questioning whether Bangladesh's independence struggle was merely to replace Pakistani colonial rule with Indian subjugation. [Grokipedia](#)

This position has been widely discussed and fiercely contested. Defenders of the position argue that it represents a principled application of the tradition's anti-colonial framework to the specific conditions of Bangladesh's relationship with its dominant neighbor: that India's geopolitical influence in Bangladesh, its economic leverage, its intelligence activities, and its consistent support for whichever Bangladeshi government serves its strategic interests most effectively, represent a real and significant form of informal imperial domination that the tradition's analytical framework is well-suited to analyze. Critics of the position argue that it represents a dangerous simplification of a complex geopolitical relationship, that it plays into the hands of anti-Indian political forces including Islamist parties, and that it ignores the genuine ways in which India's support for Bangladesh in 1971 was a principled response to Pakistani military atrocities rather than merely a geopolitical calculation.

The tradition's framework provides resources for evaluating this controversy without resolving it by fiat. The commitment to anti-colonialism is genuine and deep in the tradition, and the application of anti-colonial analysis to the specific conditions of Bangladesh's relationship with India is a legitimate extension of this commitment. But the tradition's equally deep commitment to intellectual honesty requires that this application be conducted with genuine attention to the

specific evidence and genuine recognition of the complexity of the relationship, rather than as a polemical assertion that serves immediate political purposes. Whether Khan's specific arguments about Indian influence meet this standard of intellectual honesty is a question that deserves serious rather than partisan engagement.

On April 12, 2025, Khan criticized Indian assertions about minority oppression in Bangladesh as tools to portray Bangladesh as unstable and in need of Indian oversight, dismissing them as unsubstantiated and motivated by geopolitical calculation rather than genuine concern for minorities. [Groklopedia](#) This specific claim is genuinely debatable, and the tradition's commitment to genuine inquiry demands that it be debated seriously rather than either accepted uncritically on the basis of the tradition's authority or rejected polemically on the basis of pro-Indian political sympathies.

94.4 The Question of Political Islam and the Tradition's Ambivalences

A second major area of controversy in the tradition's recent development concerns its relationship to political Islam and specifically to the question of whether the tradition's critique of the secular-nationalist tradition's failures opens a space that can be occupied by political Islamist movements. This concern has been raised by various critics on the secular left and among liberal intellectuals, and it deserves careful engagement.

The concern is real, even if its strongest formulations are overstated. The tradition's critique of secular nationalism's failures, its argument for the recognition of Islamic intellectual tradition, its defense of Qawmi madrasa recognition, and its anti-Indian nationalism could all, if appropriated without their broader intellectual context, be incorporated into a political Islamist narrative that the tradition itself would reject. The history of intellectual ideas is replete with examples of positions developed in the service of genuine intellectual liberation being appropriated in the service of new forms of domination, and the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is not immune to this risk.

Ahmed Sofa held the belief that much of Bangladesh's Muslim population was not fundamentalist at all, but that without a concerted effort for dialogue, the dichotomies between secular and religious Bangladesh bore the seeds for fascism. This fascist tide has been decades in the making, stemming not from some inherently Islamic ideology but from the expressly state-capturing agenda of an internationally backed Muslim class who have been able to exploit the vacuums created from the continued economic and political deprivation of the majority of Bengali Muslims. [The Daily Star](#) This analysis, developed by Sofa decades before the specific political developments of 2024-2026, provides the tradition's own best response to the concern about its relationship to political Islam. The tradition has consistently argued that the rise of political Islam in Bangladesh is a symptom of the failure of the secular nationalist tradition to deliver on its democratic and developmental promises, not a cause of those failures. The appropriate response to this symptom is not the reassertion of a secular nationalism that has already demonstrated its inadequacy, but the genuine democratic transformation of the conditions that have made political Islamist politics attractive to significant portions of the Bangladeshi population.

94.5 The Sofa-Mazhar Relationship and the Limits of Intellectual Solidarity

The relationship between Ahmed Sofa and Farhad Mazhar is another important source of controversy and insight in the tradition's history. Mazhar, one of the most original and controversial Bangladeshi thinkers of his generation, was closely associated with Sofa during the 1980s and early 1990s and shared many of Sofa's anti-establishment intellectual commitments. But the two figures subsequently diverged in significant ways, with Mazhar moving in directions that combined ecological politics with a form of political Islam that Sofa found intellectually and politically untenable.

While Khan's views have often been considered to be analogous to Farhad Mazhar's, he has been strongly critical of Mazhar's position in recent years. In a 2011 debate, Khan sharply differed from Mazhar on the film *Meherjaan*. In 2013, in the backdrop of the Shahbagh Movement in Dhaka, Khan came out in strong support of the movement and criticized Farhad Mazhar's position with regard to the events. [Tritiyomatra](#) This pattern of intellectual divergence and public criticism, within what might have been assumed to be a broadly aligned intellectual formation, is characteristic of the tradition's commitment to intellectual honesty over solidarity: the refusal to maintain intellectual alliances that have ceased to serve the requirements of genuine inquiry.

The Sofa-Mazhar and Khan-Mazhar divergences illuminate a broader pattern in the tradition's intellectual history: its consistent refusal to allow the requirements of political solidarity to override the requirements of intellectual honesty. The tradition has consistently modeled a form of intellectual integrity that is in principle applicable to all of its own positions as well as to those of its opponents: the willingness to say that a position one has previously held, or that a colleague one has previously aligned with, is wrong, when the evidence and argument support that conclusion.

CHAPTER NINETY-FIVE: THE ETHICAL AND MORAL ARCHITECTURE OF THE TRADITION

What the Three Pillars Actually Stand For

95.1 Ethics as Practice Rather Than Prescription

The ethical significance of the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is not primarily expressed in formal ethical theory: in systematic accounts of the foundations of moral obligation, the nature of rights, or the principles of just social organization. All three figures have engaged with ethical questions, but their engagement has characteristically been concrete and practice-oriented rather than abstract and theoretical. The tradition's ethics is an ethics of intellectual and political practice: an account of what it means to conduct oneself rightly as a thinking human being in the specific conditions of Bangladeshi intellectual and political life.

The central ethical commitment of the tradition, running through all three figures despite their significant differences of temperament, style, and theoretical orientation, is the commitment to

intellectual honesty. Intellectual honesty means, in the tradition's usage, something more specific and more demanding than the commonplace assertion that one should tell the truth. It means the commitment to following arguments wherever they lead, regardless of the political or social consequences; the refusal to say what is expedient when it conflicts with what one believes to be true; the willingness to acknowledge uncertainty, error, and the limits of one's own understanding; the insistence on genuine engagement with counterarguments rather than their dismissal or caricature; and the maintenance of this commitment even in conditions of severe social pressure, political hostility, and institutional sanction.

This commitment to intellectual honesty is the ethical core of the tradition because it is the condition of the possibility of all the tradition's other commitments. Without intellectual honesty, the anti-colonial critique becomes a political slogan rather than a genuine analytical framework. Without intellectual honesty, the democratic commitment becomes a justification for whichever political arrangement the intellectual's patrons prefer rather than a genuine standard against which political arrangements can be measured. Without intellectual honesty, the pedagogical commitment becomes a reproduction of the authority structures it claims to oppose rather than a genuine liberation of the learner's intellectual capacities. Intellectual honesty is not merely one value among others in the tradition's ethical framework. It is the condition of the possibility of the tradition's entire intellectual and political project.

95.2 Abdur Razzaq's Ethics of Refusal

The most distinctive ethical figure in the tradition is Abdur Razzaq, whose entire intellectual life can be understood as an ethics of refusal: the refusal to publish when he did not believe that what he had produced met the standards of genuine understanding; the refusal to submit to intellectual authority structures that he did not find genuinely authoritative; the refusal to adopt the political alignments that career advancement would have rewarded; and, most dramatically, the refusal to be intimidated by the Pakistani military regime's threat of imprisonment during the liberation war.

This last refusal deserves particular attention as an ethical exemplar. When the Pakistani military came to arrest Razzaq at his home on the night of Operation Searchlight in March 1971, Razzaq escaped through the back door and spent the following months in hiding within Bangladesh. The Yahya Khan government subsequently sentenced him in absentia to fourteen years of rigorous imprisonment for his role in supporting the liberation movement. The willingness to accept this sentence, to maintain his position in the face of state violence, and to continue his intellectual and political engagement with the liberation struggle is a form of moral courage that the tradition rightly honors and that provides a standard against which the intellectual's obligations in conditions of political crisis can be assessed.

But Razzaq's ethics of refusal was not merely the courage to resist state violence. It was also the intellectual courage to refuse the comfortable positions that the postcolonial intellectual culture offered to those willing to conform. His refusal to publish, which puzzled and sometimes frustrated his admirers, was among other things a form of ethical commitment: a refusal to submit his thinking to forms of institutional assessment that he did not find intellectually legitimate, a refusal to produce the kind of finalized and conclusive intellectual product that the

academic credit system rewards when he believed that the understanding it would represent would be premature and inadequate. This is an extremely demanding form of intellectual integrity, one that most intellectuals are incapable of sustaining, and it represents one of the tradition's most important ethical contributions: the demonstration that the standards of genuine intellectual achievement are set by the requirements of understanding rather than by the requirements of institutional recognition.

95.3 Ahmed Sofa's Ethics of the Witness

Ahmed Sofa's ethical stance is best understood through the concept of the witness: the person who sees what is happening clearly and is obligated to say what they see, regardless of the social consequences. This concept of the intellectual as witness, as the person who has the clarity of vision and the moral courage to name what is actually happening in a society that conspires to prevent honest naming, is one of the most important ethical contributions of the tradition to Bangladeshi intellectual life.

Sofa's witnessing was not merely passive observation. It was active and engaged: a witnessing that connected observation to analysis, that situated specific observations within broader historical and structural frameworks, and that drew from these frameworks the implications for what genuine intellectual and political practice required. His witnessing of the opportunism of the Bangladeshi intellectual class, for example, was not merely a report of observed behavior but an analysis of the structural conditions that produced that behavior and an argument about the forms of intellectual practice that might constitute genuine resistance to those conditions.

The ethics of the witness, as Sofa practiced it, also required the acceptance of social costs. Sofa was called mad, insolent, a rebel, and an enemy of intellectual solidarity. He was excluded from the networks of institutional recognition that his literary achievements would otherwise have entitled him to. He rejected the awards that were offered to him and the invitations to meet with political leaders that would have conferred a different kind of recognition. Ahmed Sofa rejected the Lekhak Shibir Award in 1975 and the Bangla Academy's Sadat Ali Akhand Award in 1993, and it is also heard that he once declined to meet the Prime Minister despite being summoned. [Views Bangladesh](#) These refusals are not merely biographical curiosities. They are ethical statements: assertions of the independence of the intellectual's judgment from the structures of institutional recognition and political patronage that the intellectual culture of Bangladesh consistently attempts to subordinate intellectual work to.

95.4 Salimullah Khan's Ethics of Engagement

Salimullah Khan's ethical stance is different from Razzaq's ethics of refusal and Sofa's ethics of witnessing, though it builds on both. It might be characterized as an ethics of engagement: a commitment to engaging, persistently and rigorously, with the specific intellectual and political problems of Bangladesh in the specific historical moment, drawing on the most sophisticated theoretical resources available, and maintaining this engagement through the specific difficulties and controversies that genuine intellectual work generates.

Khan's ethics of engagement is expressed most fully in his practice as a public intellectual: his participation in television debates and public discussions, his engagement with student movements and political controversies, his sustained commentary on political events and cultural developments through newspaper columns, lectures, and digital media. This public engagement is characterized by the same intellectual rigor that his published theoretical work demonstrates, but it applies that rigor to the immediate conditions of Bangladeshi political life rather than to the more abstract questions of theoretical philosophy.

Khan received the Bangla Academy Literary Award in 2024 for outstanding contributions to essays and prose, and in May 2025 he was honored with the Selim Al Deen Literary Award by the Feni Sahitto Sabha, recognizing his body of work as a writer, essayist, and public intellectual. [Grokopedia](#) These awards represent a form of institutional recognition that Sofa systematically refused, and they raise the question of whether Khan's acceptance of them represents a departure from the tradition's ethics or a legitimate adaptation to different institutional conditions. The answer requires careful attention to the specific conditions under which these awards were offered and accepted, and to the question of whether Khan's acceptance has been accompanied by any compromise in the independence and rigor of his intellectual engagement. The evidence suggests that the awards have not softened his critical positions: his sustained critique of Indian influence, his criticism of the post-2024 political landscape, and his complaints about the treatment of award recipients at the Bangla Academy ceremony all suggest that institutional recognition has not purchased the intellectual conformity that the tradition's ethics demands the intellectual refuse.

CHAPTER NINETY-SIX: INTERPERSONAL AND INTRAPERSONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE TRADITION

The Inner Lives of Thinking People in Conditions of Political Crisis

96.1 The Personal Costs of Intellectual Integrity

Any account of the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan that is honest about the full range of human experience that the tradition embodies must address the personal costs that the tradition's ethical commitments have imposed on each of its central figures. Intellectual integrity of the kind that the tradition models is not costless. It generates social exclusion, professional marginalization, political persecution, and in some cases extreme personal hardship. Understanding these costs is important not because suffering is a qualification for intellectual achievement but because the willingness to accept these costs is part of what the tradition's ethical commitment means in practice.

Abdur Razzaq's personal costs included the flight from his home during Operation Searchlight, the years of teaching in a politically charged institutional environment that did not always appreciate or protect genuine intellectual independence, and the frustration of a man of extraordinary intellectual gifts who chose never to publish his own work and was therefore denied the forms of international recognition that his abilities would otherwise have earned. His

decision to return from London after Laski's death, without completing a doctoral thesis, was also personally costly: it committed him to a career in a relatively peripheral academic institution at a time when the most gifted South Asian intellectuals were making names for themselves in international academic settings. The ethical commitment that underlay this decision, the refusal to submit his work to assessment standards he did not find genuinely authoritative, was real, but so was the personal cost of living with the consequences of that refusal.

Ahmed Sofa's personal costs were more visible and more dramatic. He lived much of his adult life in poverty, sustained by the generosity of friends and admirers rather than by institutional income, because his refusal to compromise his intellectual positions made him unemployable in the institutional contexts that would have provided economic security. His bohemian lifestyle, celebrated by those who admired his independence, was also the expression of a genuine economic marginalization that made sustained scholarly work extraordinarily difficult. His exclusion from the networks of institutional recognition that his literary achievements deserved left him isolated in ways that must have been painful, even for a person of his extraordinary strength of character. And his death in 2001, at the relatively young age of fifty-eight, cut short an intellectual life that was still developing and producing work of the highest quality.

Salimullah Khan's personal costs have been different in kind but not negligible. His public intellectual positions have made him a controversial figure who attracts both passionate support and passionate hostility in roughly equal measure. His willingness to say what he thinks in public, on politically charged questions about Indian influence, political Islam, and the specific failures of Bangladeshi political leaders and parties, has made him a target of organized hostility from various political quarters. His institutional position, first at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh and then at North South University, has not always provided the protection and support that his intellectual commitments require, and his complaints about the treatment of award recipients at the Bangla Academy ceremony in 2025 suggest that even formal institutional recognition does not always translate into genuine respect for the intellectual's contribution.

96.2 The Inner Lives of the Tradition's Figures

Behind the public intellectual figures of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan are human beings with inner lives, emotional vulnerabilities, personal relationships, and private struggles that are only partially visible in their public work and public personae. To engage with these inner dimensions honestly is not to reduce the tradition to biographical gossip but to honor the full humanity of the people who have made it.

Abdur Razzaq's inner life is the least accessible of the three, partly because of his characteristic indirection and partly because the primary sources for his biography are the testimonies of those who knew him as a teacher and interlocutor rather than as a private person. But from these sources a picture emerges of a man of extraordinary intellectual depth, genuine warmth and generosity toward those he cared about, and a certain melancholy that was perhaps the inevitable companion of a man who had set himself impossibly high intellectual standards and who understood, more clearly than most, the gap between what Bangladesh was and what it might become. His love for his students and his commitment to their intellectual development were

genuine and passionate. His sadness about the state of Bangladesh's intellectual and political life was equally genuine and, in his later years, increasingly difficult to conceal.

Ahmed Sofa's inner life is more visible, partly because he wrote about it more directly and partly because his characteristic emotional style, the passionate urgency, the moral outrage, the fierce loyalty and equally fierce disappointment, was not easily concealed behind professional composure. His memoir of Razzaq is one of the most emotionally honest documents in the Bengali literary canon: a sustained and precise account of what it means to be formed by a teacher, to love and admire that teacher, and to develop, through the process of genuine intellectual formation, a perspective that diverges from the teacher's in ways that create both liberation and grief. His relationships with other figures in the Bangladeshi literary world were characterized by the same combination of intense loyalty and intense critical honesty that characterized his relationship with Razzaq: he loved deeply and criticized fiercely, and he did not easily forgive what he perceived as intellectual or moral betrayal.

Salimullah Khan's inner life, of the three, is the most directly expressed in his public intellectual work, which is characterized by a personal voice of unusual directness and emotional presence. Khan does not hide behind a mask of academic objectivity. His intellectual engagements are personal in the deepest sense: they are expressions of a genuine human being grappling with questions that matter to him as a person formed by the specific conditions of Bangladeshi life, as a disciple of Sofa and an indirect disciple of Razzaq, as a teacher of students whose intellectual futures he cares about deeply, and as a citizen of a country whose political failures he has analyzed with such precision that he cannot avoid feeling them acutely.

96.3 The Social Networks of the Tradition

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has been sustained not only by the intellectual work of its three central figures but by the social networks, the communities of intellectual practice, through which their ideas have been developed, transmitted, and contested. These networks include the students and former students of Abdur Razzaq who have carried his influence into every dimension of Bangladeshi intellectual and political life, the writers and critics who were shaped by their engagement with Ahmed Sofa's work and whose own work extends the tradition's intellectual project in new directions, and the students and interlocutors of Salimullah Khan who are now beginning to make their own contributions to Bangladeshi intellectual life.

The Ahmed Sofa Rashtra Sabha, the organization created to continue the intellectual legacy of Sofa's political philosophy, represents one important node of this social network in its contemporary expression. But the tradition's social network extends far beyond any single organization. It includes the informal conversations, the reading groups, the social media discussions, and the public intellectual events through which the tradition's ideas circulate in contemporary Bangladeshi intellectual culture. It includes the teachers in Bangladeshi schools and universities who have been shaped by the tradition's pedagogy and who are attempting, with varying degrees of success and in varying degrees of institutional support, to implement something like the tradition's educational values in their own teaching practice. And it includes the young Bangladeshis who have encountered the tradition through YouTube lectures, newspaper columns, and social media discussions, and who find in the tradition's intellectual

framework resources for understanding and engaging with the specific challenges of their own moment in Bangladeshi history.

CHAPTER NINETY-SEVEN: THE TRADITION AS HISTORICAL ACTOR

How Ideas Have Shaped Events

97.1 Intellectual History as Causal History

One of the most persistent and most philosophically interesting questions in the study of intellectual history is the question of causation: what role, if any, do ideas actually play in the causation of historical events? This question is particularly acute in the study of the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, because the tradition has consistently claimed that ideas matter enormously for the development of Bangladesh, that the intellectual formation of the political class is causally significant for political outcomes, and that the transformation of intellectual culture is a necessary condition of genuine political transformation. If these claims are correct, then the tradition's intellectual work has been causally significant in ways that extend far beyond the domain of intellectual history proper.

The evidence for the tradition's causal significance in Bangladeshi political and intellectual history is genuinely substantial, though it is necessarily indirect and difficult to measure with the precision that would satisfy the methodological requirements of causal social science. The influence of Abdur Razzaq on the political formation of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and other leaders of the independence movement is attested by multiple sources and is acknowledged by political historians as significant, though the specific mechanisms and extent of this influence are difficult to specify with precision. The influence of Ahmed Sofa on a generation of Bangladeshi writers, filmmakers, and intellectuals is visible in the specific ways in which their work engages with the questions that Sofa's writing put on the intellectual agenda. And the influence of Salimullah Khan on the intellectual formation of significant portions of the student generation that led the 2024 uprising is suggested by the specific conceptual frameworks and political values that these students expressed in their public communications.

97.2 The Tradition and the Liberation War

The tradition's most directly historically significant contribution was its role in the intellectual preparation for the liberation war of 1971. This was not the contribution of a tradition that issued a call to arms or provided military or logistical support for the liberation struggle. It was the contribution of a tradition that had spent the preceding two decades developing the intellectual framework within which the legitimacy of Bengali political self-determination could be argued, the injustices of the Pakistani political arrangement could be analyzed with conceptual precision, and the moral and political stakes of resistance could be understood.

Abdur Razzaq's influence on the political thinking of the generation that led the liberation movement is the most direct expression of this contribution. His analysis of Pakistan's political

structure, his account of the economic exploitation of East Pakistan by West Pakistan, his understanding of the specific forms of cultural aggression represented by the imposition of Urdu, and his broader framework for thinking about the relationship between language, culture, identity, and political self-determination all contributed to the specific ways in which the Bengali nationalist political consciousness of the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s was articulated and developed. The students who sat in his classroom and walked away with questions rather than answers were, in the long run, better equipped to navigate the political complexities of the liberation struggle than students who had been given ready-made answers to questions they had not yet learned to ask properly.

97.3 The Tradition and the Post-Liberation Disillusionment

The tradition's second historically significant contribution is its role in articulating and analyzing the post-liberation disillusionment: the gap between the democratic and developmental aspirations of the liberation movement and the specific ways in which independent Bangladesh failed to fulfill those aspirations. Ahmed Sofa's 1972 essay on the new mode of Bangladeshi intellectualism, published in the immediate aftermath of independence, was the first and most powerful articulation of this disillusionment in intellectual terms. It named, with extraordinary precision and without the comfortable rationalizations that the majority of the intellectual class preferred, the specific ways in which the independence movement's intellectual leadership had already begun to reconstitute the opportunism and servility that had characterized the intellectual class under colonial and Pakistani rule.

This contribution is historically significant because it established, at the beginning of Bangladesh's independent existence, an intellectual standard against which the country's subsequent political and intellectual development could be measured and found wanting. The articulation of this standard, its consistent application to successive political arrangements, and its transmission to subsequent generations through both published writing and the social networks of the intellectual community have been the mechanism through which the tradition has exercised its continuing influence on Bangladeshi political culture, even in periods when that influence has been suppressed or marginalized by the dominant political arrangements.

97.4 The Tradition and the 2024 Uprising: A Causal Account

The most recent and most directly verifiable expression of the tradition's historical significance is its contribution to the intellectual formation of the student generation that led the 2024 uprising. This contribution is not the simple transmission of a political program: the tradition has never had a political program in the narrow sense. It is rather the contribution of a set of intellectual frameworks and intellectual values that enabled a generation of young Bangladeshis to analyze their political situation with unusual clarity, to articulate their demands in terms of principled arguments rather than mere grievances, and to maintain their intellectual and political independence in the face of both state violence and the pressures of established political organizations attempting to capture their movement.

The specific connections between the tradition's intellectual influence and the 2024 uprising are multiple and traceable. Salimullah Khan's consistent articulation, over many years of public

intellectual work, of the principle that the three foundational values of Bangladesh's liberation war are equality, human dignity, and social justice, provided the student movement with a political vocabulary grounded in the tradition of the liberation struggle rather than in the specific partisan narratives of the Awami League that had monopolized the liberation war's symbolic legacy for decades. His critique of the Hasina government's authoritarianism, developed within this framework, provided the intellectual basis for the students' claim that the government had betrayed rather than fulfilled the liberation war's aspirations. And his broader theoretical framework of postcolonial decolonization provided the intellectual resources for the students' sense that what was needed was not merely a change of government but a genuine structural transformation of the conditions of political life in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER NINETY-EIGHT: THE TRADITION'S UNREALIZED POSSIBILITIES

What Remains to Be Done

98.1 The Gaps in the Tradition's Achievement

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has achieved a great deal. But intellectual honesty, which is the tradition's own central ethical commitment, requires that its failures and limitations be acknowledged with the same clarity with which its achievements are celebrated. The tradition has significant gaps in its coverage of Bangladeshi experience, significant weaknesses in its theoretical framework, and significant failures to translate its intellectual insights into the practical reforms that its analysis demands.

The most significant gap in the tradition's coverage is its inadequate engagement with the experience of women in Bangladeshi society. The tradition has not been gender-neutral in any positive sense: it has been primarily male in its intellectual personnel, its social networks, and its analytical frameworks. The specific experiences of Bangladeshi women, the specific forms of oppression, resistance, and aspiration that characterize their lives, and the specific intellectual traditions through which they have articulated these experiences, have not been adequately incorporated into the tradition's analytical framework. This is a serious limitation in a tradition that claims to develop a comprehensive understanding of Bangladeshi society, and it is a limitation that the tradition's future development must address if it is to remain intellectually adequate to the conditions of a Bangladesh in which women's political agency has become increasingly visible and increasingly significant.

Despite comprising over fifty percent of the population and consistently demonstrating higher voter turnout in competitive elections, women account for only 4.22 percent of candidates in the 2026 election, representing the lowest women's candidacy rate since 1991. [Global Voices](#) This specific datum about the 2026 election illustrates the continuing inadequacy of Bangladeshi political culture's relationship to gender equality, and the tradition's analysis of political clientelism and institutional capture needs to be extended to address the specific mechanisms through which gender inequality is reproduced within these structures if it is to provide an adequate framework for understanding the full range of Bangladesh's political failures.

A second significant gap is the tradition's relatively limited engagement with the experience of Bangladesh's religious, ethnic, and regional minorities. The Hindu minority, the Buddhist community of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the various indigenous communities, and the more recent experience of the Rohingya refugee population all represent dimensions of Bangladeshi social reality that the tradition has addressed only partially and inconsistently. Salimullah Khan's engagement with the Rohingya question represents a partial exception, but even this engagement has not been fully integrated into the tradition's broader analytical framework.

98.2 The Climate Crisis and its Challenge to the Tradition

A third significant gap in the tradition's analytical framework is its inadequate engagement with the ecological dimensions of Bangladeshi development, and specifically with the existential challenge that climate change poses to the physical survival of Bangladesh as a livable territory. Bangladesh is one of the countries most vulnerable to the consequences of climate change: its low-lying delta geography, its extreme dependence on agricultural production, and its limited resources for adaptation all make it acutely exposed to the rising sea levels, intensifying monsoons, and more frequent extreme weather events that climate change is already producing and that current trajectories suggest will worsen dramatically over the coming decades.

The tradition's analysis of Bangladesh's political and intellectual failures, however sophisticated and penetrating, has not adequately engaged with this existential dimension. The postcolonial analytical framework that the tradition has developed is primarily a framework for understanding the political and intellectual dimensions of colonial domination and postcolonial underdevelopment. It needs to be extended to address the specific ways in which the ecological crisis is both a product of and a new form of the global power asymmetries that the tradition has analyzed in political and economic terms, and to develop the specific forms of political and intellectual response that Bangladesh's ecological crisis demands.

A panel at the Bangladesh Future Forum 2026 critically examined how climate-driven interventions and GDP-centric development models in Bangladesh often marginalize nature, livelihoods, and ecological integrity, calling for critical dialogue on moving beyond climate-centric narratives toward development pathways that protect nature, sustain livelihoods, and prioritize human and ecological wellbeing. [Bangladeshfutureforum](#) This kind of discussion, connecting the ecological crisis to the broader questions of development, power, and justice that the tradition has long engaged with, points toward the directions in which the tradition's analytical framework needs to be extended to address the full range of challenges facing Bangladesh in the second quarter of the twenty-first century.

98.3 The Digital Transformation and the Tradition's Opportunity

The digital transformation of Bangladeshi public life, which has accelerated dramatically over the past decade and which has fundamentally altered the conditions of intellectual and political communication, represents both a challenge and an opportunity for the tradition. The challenge is the one identified in Part Eight: the shallow, fragmented, and attention-deficit character of much digital media consumption is difficult to reconcile with the depth of engagement that genuine intellectual formation requires. The opportunity is the one identified in Part Nine: the possibility

of reaching audiences that were previously inaccessible through print-based media and of creating the conditions for genuine intellectual engagement at a scale that the tradition's primarily personal and institutional modes of transmission could not achieve.

The tradition's future development will require a more systematic and strategic engagement with the opportunities of digital transformation than it has so far achieved. Salimullah Khan's online presence represents a beginning, and the circulation of his lectures and debates through YouTube and social media has demonstrably expanded the tradition's intellectual reach. But the systematic archiving of the tradition's oral and textual legacy, the development of genuinely high-quality digital educational materials in Bengali, and the creation of online intellectual communities that sustain the kind of genuine dialogical engagement that the tradition's pedagogy values all represent possibilities that have not yet been adequately exploited.

CHAPTER NINETY-NINE: THE TRADITION AND THE WORLD

What Bangladesh's Thinkers Offer to Global Intellectual Conversations

99.1 From Periphery to Center

The intellectual tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has been produced in what the global knowledge economy treats as a peripheral location: a low-income South Asian country without major research universities, without significant English-language publishing, and without the institutional resources to produce and disseminate academic work at the scale and quality that determines recognition in the global intellectual economy. Yet the specific questions that the tradition has engaged with, and the specific insights it has developed in engaging with them, are not peripheral questions. They are central questions for any serious intellectual engagement with the conditions of human life in the twenty-first century.

The question of how societies that have been shaped by European colonial domination can achieve genuine political, cultural, and intellectual self-determination is not a peripheral question. It is one of the most important questions facing most of the world's population. The question of how Islamic intellectual and cultural traditions can engage productively with the challenges of modernity without either surrendering their specific insights or retreating into defensive conservatism is not a peripheral question. It is one of the most consequential questions of the current historical moment, with implications for the political and cultural development of more than a billion people across multiple continents. The question of how genuinely democratic intellectual and political culture can be built in conditions of poverty, inequality, and institutional fragility is not a peripheral question. It is the question that most of the world's societies face in some form and that most of the world's intellectual traditions have only partially addressed.

The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has engaged with all of these questions with sustained seriousness and genuine philosophical depth. Its answers are not universal: they are answers worked out in the specific conditions of Bengali Muslim modernity, and they cannot simply be transferred to other contexts without the careful process of translation, adaptation, and critical

examination that the tradition's own intellectual practice demands. But they are genuine answers: contributions to the global intellectual conversation about these questions that could enrich that conversation significantly if they were more widely known and more fully engaged with.

99.2 The South Asian Regional Context

Within the South Asian regional context, the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan represents a distinctive and important voice in the broader intellectual conversation about the postcolonial condition. The South Asian intellectual tradition encompasses a remarkable range of perspectives and positions, from the Hindu nationalist tradition of India to the secular-democratic tradition of the Indian National Congress, from the Pakistani Islamic nationalist tradition to the Sri Lankan Buddhist nationalist tradition, and from the multiple Marxist and socialist traditions that have been significant across the region to the various liberal and cosmopolitan traditions associated with specific writers, thinkers, and institutions. The Bengali Muslim tradition represented by Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is distinctive within this landscape because of its specific combination of commitments: to Bengali cultural identity, to Islamic intellectual tradition, to democratic political values, to anti-colonial politics, and to the kind of rigorous and honest intellectual engagement that none of these commitments can sustain without.

The tradition's relationship to the Indian intellectual tradition is particularly complex and deserves separate consideration. The two great intellectual traditions of Bengal, the Hindu Bengali tradition centered in Calcutta and the Muslim Bengali tradition centered in Dhaka, have been in dialogue and in tension throughout the period covered by this textbook. The partition of 1947 did not sever this relationship but transformed it, creating new conditions for both dialogue and tension. The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan is genuinely Bengali in its linguistic and cultural formation and therefore genuinely connected to the broader Bengali intellectual tradition that includes figures like Rabindranath Tagore, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, and a wide range of other writers, thinkers, and artists whose work is part of the shared Bengali cultural heritage. But it is also distinctly Muslim Bengali, distinctly Bangladeshi, and distinctly committed to the specific political and intellectual project of a Bangladesh that understands itself as an independent political entity rather than as a peripheral expression of a broader Bengali or South Asian cultural formation.

99.3 The Islamic World and the Tradition's Contribution

Within the broader context of Islamic intellectual life, the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan represents a distinctive and important voice that deserves more recognition than it has received. The dominant traditions of Islamic intellectual life in the contemporary period are organized primarily around the major centers of Islamic learning and scholarship: the Arab world, particularly Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran; the Pakistani tradition of Islamic political thought; the Turkish tradition of Islamic modernism; and the various diaspora intellectual traditions of Muslims in Western Europe and North America. The Bengali Muslim tradition represented by Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has been largely invisible within this broader Islamic intellectual landscape, partly because it is conducted in Bengali rather than in Arabic, English, or Urdu, and partly because its specific concerns and perspectives do not map neatly onto the categories that dominate the major traditions of Islamic intellectual debate.

Yet the tradition's specific contribution to Islamic intellectual life is genuinely valuable. Its sustained engagement with the question of how Islamic identity relates to democratic political values, developed in the specific historical conditions of a Bengali Muslim society that has experienced both the promises and the failures of Islamic nationalist politics, provides a perspective that the major traditions of Islamic political thought have not adequately incorporated. Its analysis of the ways in which Islamic identity can be mobilized in the service of genuine democratic aspirations and in the service of authoritarian suppression of those aspirations provides insights that are directly relevant to the intellectual and political challenges facing Islamic societies across the world. And its insistence on the compatibility of genuine Islamic commitment with rigorous intellectual honesty and critical engagement with the full range of human intellectual achievement provides a model of Islamic intellectual practice that stands as an alternative to both the defensive conservatism of traditional Islamic scholarship and the superficial modernism of Islamic reformers who have abandoned the tradition's genuine insights in the process of updating its external forms.

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED: THE THREE PILLARS AND WHAT THEY BUILT

A Final Reckoning

100.1 What the Tradition Has Built

The metaphor of the three pillars, which provides the title of this textbook, is both apt and in need of complication. Pillars, in architecture, support a structure: they bear the weight of whatever is built above them and transmit that weight to the foundation below. The metaphor suggests that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan supports something: a structure of thought, of cultural life, of political possibility, of human development that would collapse without the intellectual work that they have done and that the tradition they have created continues to do.

What is this structure? It is, most fundamentally, the possibility of genuine thought about Bangladesh: the possibility of understanding what Bangladesh actually is, how it came to be, what has gone wrong with it, and what it might yet become. This may seem like a modest claim. But it is not modest in the conditions of Bangladesh's actual intellectual and political life, where the forces that suppress genuine thought, political clientelism, economic dependence, institutional capture, colonial epistemological hierarchies, religious conservatism, and nationalist mythology, are strong and persistent. The creation and maintenance of a genuine intellectual tradition that can name these forces, analyze them with rigor, and articulate alternatives to the forms of life they impose is a remarkable achievement: an achievement that has required sustained effort, significant personal sacrifice, and the specific combination of intellectual gifts and moral courage that only a few individuals in any generation possess.

The tradition has also built a community: a social network of intellectuals, writers, students, teachers, and citizens whose thinking has been formed or influenced by the tradition's practice and who carry the tradition's intellectual commitments into every domain of Bangladeshi cultural and political life. This community is not homogeneous or harmonious: it encompasses significant

disagreements, tensions, and divisions that are themselves expressions of the tradition's commitment to genuine intellectual engagement over conformity and solidarity. But it is a community nonetheless, bound together by shared intellectual values and shared engagement with the specific questions that the tradition has put at the center of Bangladeshi intellectual life.

And the tradition has built a standard: a set of intellectual and ethical requirements against which Bangladeshi intellectual and political practice can be assessed. This standard is demanding. It requires intellectual honesty over opportunism, genuine engagement over performance, democratic commitment over political convenience, and critical independence over institutional loyalty. Very few individuals and very few institutions meet this standard fully and consistently. But the existence of the standard, clearly articulated and modeled in three lives of sustained intellectual effort, makes the failures of Bangladeshi intellectual and political culture visible in ways that they would not be without it. And visible failures are the necessary precondition for genuine improvement.

100.2 The Question of Succession

The most urgent practical question facing the tradition as it moves forward from the specific historical moment of 2026 is the question of succession: who will carry the tradition's intellectual project forward after Salimullah Khan, and in what form will the tradition develop in the hands of a new generation of thinkers who have been formed by but are not identical to their predecessors?

This question is both genuinely open and genuinely important. The tradition is not a museum piece, fixed in the specific intellectual forms produced by its founding figures and requiring only preservation and commentary. It is a living intellectual tradition whose continued vitality depends on its capacity for genuine development: for engaging with new questions, new theoretical resources, and new historical conditions in ways that are consistent with its foundational commitments while not being imprisoned by its foundational forms.

The new generation of Bangladeshi intellectuals who might carry the tradition forward faces specific conditions that are different from those that formed Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan, and that will require adaptation and development of the tradition's intellectual framework rather than its simple reproduction. They face a Bangladesh that has undergone a potentially transformative political upheaval and that is now navigating the complex and uncertain terrain of post-Hasina political reconstruction. The political trajectory of Bangladesh since the August 2024 uprising is defined by the simultaneous but somewhat contradictory pursuit of a fundamental democratic transition and a radical ideological realignment, with the 2026 general election serving as a pivotal contest not just for parliamentary control but between institutional integrity and populist ideological momentum. [LSE](#) They face a Bangladesh that is more digitally connected, more urbanized, more economically complex, and more internationally integrated than the Bangladesh that formed the tradition's founding figures, and that therefore poses questions about identity, development, and democratic governance that the tradition's existing frameworks can begin to address but cannot fully resolve.

They face a global intellectual context in which the traditions that the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has engaged with, Marxism, psychoanalysis, postcolonial theory, Islamic political thought, and democratic theory, have all developed significantly since they were first incorporated into the tradition's framework, in ways that create both new resources and new challenges for the tradition's intellectual project. And they face the specific challenge of translating the tradition's insights from the oral and essay-based forms in which they have primarily been expressed into the digital, multimedia, and increasingly international forms that the contemporary intellectual landscape demands.

100.3 The Tradition's Message for Bangladesh in 2026

Standing in April 2026, in a Bangladesh that has just completed the most significant democratic transition in its history since independence, that is navigating the complex aftermath of a potentially transformative political upheaval, and that faces the combined challenges of ecological catastrophe, economic inequality, institutional weakness, and cultural contestation that have characterized its entire independent existence, what is the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan's message?

The message is not optimistic in any simple or comforting sense. The tradition has spent seven decades analyzing the specific mechanisms through which Bangladeshi society repeatedly fails to fulfill its democratic and developmental potential, and those mechanisms have not been dissolved by the events of 2024. The July Declaration of August 5, 2025 acknowledged the struggle of the people, denounced Sheikh Hasina's autocratic rule, and called for justice, accountability, and institutional reconstruction, but analysis of its plebiscitary implementation has highlighted the tension between genuine democratic deliberation and elite-driven constitutional engineering. [Postcolonialpolitics](#) The tradition would recognize in this tension exactly the pattern it has analyzed across seven decades: the subordination of genuine democratic aspiration to the procedural forms of democratic legitimation in ways that serve elite interests rather than popular ones.

But the message is also not pessimistic in the sense of despairing. The tradition has maintained, through all of the specific failures it has analyzed, a fundamental commitment to the possibility of genuine democratic development in Bangladesh: a possibility grounded not in optimistic projections about the trajectory of political change but in the specific evidence of human capacity, moral courage, and intellectual possibility that the tradition has itself embodied and that the 2024 uprising has demonstrated at a historical scale that the tradition could not have anticipated in its specific form but that is fully consistent with its fundamental commitments.

The message is, rather, realistic in the deepest sense: committed to the specific work that genuine human development requires, in the specific conditions that actually exist, with the specific human beings and human capacities that are actually available, and without the comforting illusions that both optimism and pessimism typically provide. This realistic commitment is expressed most fully in the tradition's sustained engagement with the specific institutional, pedagogical, intellectual, and political work that genuine democratic development demands. No democracy can live when the state claims the power to slaughter its own populace, and the right to live is not a ruler's gift but the first foundation on which any society must rest.

[Postcolonial politics](#) The tradition has been making this argument, in different registers and different forms, for seven decades. The political transformation of 2024 and the constitutional deliberations of 2025 and 2026 have created conditions in which this argument might, for the first time in Bangladeshi history, be heard with the full seriousness it deserves and acted upon with the full commitment that the tradition's analysis demands.

100.4 The Tradition's Message for the World

The tradition's message for the world is, in the end, a message about the possibility and the necessity of genuine thought in conditions of political crisis. It is a message that says: even in a poor country with fragile institutions and a history of political catastrophe, it is possible to think with genuine rigor and genuine honesty about the most difficult questions of political and human life. It is possible to maintain intellectual integrity in conditions that systematically reward its abandonment. It is possible to speak truth to power, not merely as a moral gesture but as a sustained intellectual practice that produces genuine understanding of the specific ways in which power operates and of the specific alternatives to its current forms. And it is possible to transmit this practice to new generations of thinkers, not through the imposing institutional structures of elite academic life, but through the more intimate and more demanding processes of genuine intellectual formation: the Socratic conversation, the passionate essay, the theoretically rigorous public engagement.

This message is valuable precisely because it comes from the margins rather than the center of the global knowledge economy. The intellectual traditions of the wealthy North Atlantic democracies have many resources and many achievements, but they have not fully faced the specific challenge of sustaining genuine thought in conditions of extreme institutional fragility and extreme political pressure. The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has faced this challenge for seven decades and has developed, through the process of facing it, insights and practices that the more comfortable intellectual traditions of the world have not needed to develop and therefore do not possess.

The three pillars of Bengali thought are not merely historical monuments. They are living intellectual resources, as relevant to the Bangladesh of 2026 as they were to the Bangladesh of 1972, and as relevant to the intellectual and political challenges of the contemporary world as they are to the specific conditions of Bengali Muslim modernity. The work of understanding them, extending them, and applying them to the specific conditions of our own historical moment is the intellectual obligation that this textbook has aimed to equip its readers to fulfill.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF PART TEN

Part Ten has brought together the analysis of all nine preceding parts into a comprehensive account of the tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan's philosophical achievement, its global significance, its relationship to Bangladesh's contemporary political situation, its internal controversies and tensions, its ethical and moral architecture, its interpersonal and intrapersonal

dimensions, its role as a historical actor, its unrealized possibilities, and its message for both Bangladesh and the world.

Chapter Ninety-One established the tradition's principal philosophical achievements: the development of a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding Bengali Muslim society, the concept of the Bengali Muslim mind as a subject of critical philosophical inquiry, the critique of intellectual servility as a structural rather than merely individual pathology, and the theory of postcolonial modernity in specifically Bengali Muslim conditions.

Chapter Ninety-Two situated the tradition in the global postcolonial intellectual world, arguing for the specific and genuinely original contribution that the Bengali Muslim perspective makes to global conversations about decolonization, indigenous-language intellectual culture, and epistemic justice.

Chapter Ninety-Three engaged with the question of Bangladesh's national identity in 2026, tracing the tradition's consistent refusal of the binary between Bengali nationalism and Islamic identity, analyzing the July Charter of 2025 and the 2026 elections in the tradition's framework, and addressing the specific challenge of political Islam in the post-Hasina political landscape.

Chapter Ninety-Four examined the tradition's internal controversies and tensions, including the Razzaq-Sofa relationship, the India question, the political Islam ambivalence, and the Sofa-Mazhar and Khan-Mazhar divergences.

Chapter Ninety-Five described the ethical and moral architecture of the tradition, centered on the commitment to intellectual honesty as the condition of the possibility of all the tradition's other commitments, and analyzed the specific ethical stances of each of the tradition's three central figures.

Chapter Ninety-Six addressed the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of the tradition, including the personal costs of intellectual integrity, the inner lives of the tradition's figures, and the social networks that have sustained the tradition's development.

Chapter Ninety-Seven examined the tradition as a historical actor, analyzing its causal contributions to the liberation war, the articulation of post-liberation disillusionment, and the intellectual formation of the student generation that led the 2024 uprising.

Chapter Ninety-Eight identified the tradition's most significant gaps and unrealized possibilities: its inadequate engagement with gender, with religious and ethnic minorities, and with the ecological crisis, and its incomplete development of the digital opportunities available for its transmission and expansion.

Chapter Ninety-Nine placed the tradition in its global context, addressing its significance for the South Asian regional intellectual conversation, the Islamic world, and the broader global conversation about postcolonial modernity.

Chapter One Hundred offered the final reckoning: an account of what the tradition has built, the question of succession, and the tradition's message for both Bangladesh and the world.

The tradition of Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa, and Salimullah Khan is, in the end, a tradition that insists on the human capacity for genuine thought and genuine freedom in conditions that consistently deny or suppress that capacity. It is a tradition that has paid the price of this insistence in the specific personal and institutional costs of intellectual integrity in conditions of political crisis. And it is a tradition that has demonstrated, through seven decades of sustained intellectual labor, that the insistence is worth the price: that the genuine thought made possible by genuine intellectual integrity produces understanding and possibility that no comfortable conformity can provide.

Bangladesh in 2026 needs this tradition more, not less, than it has at any previous moment in its history. The political transformation of 2024 has created conditions of genuine possibility and genuine danger, conditions in which the quality of Bangladeshi intellectual life will help determine whether the possibilities are fulfilled or the dangers prevail. The tradition of Razzaq, Sofa, and Khan has been preparing Bangladesh for exactly this moment, not by providing a political program or a constitutional blueprint, but by developing, over seven decades, the intellectual capacities, the analytical frameworks, the ethical commitments, and the pedagogical practices that genuine democratic self-governance requires of the citizens and the intellectuals who must, in the end, build it themselves.

End of Part Ten

End of The Work: Abdur Razzaq, Ahmed Sofa and Salimullah Khan

General Editor's Closing Note: This textbook has been completed in the spring of 2026, in the specific historical moment created by the extraordinary events of 2024 in Bangladesh and their complex aftermath. The ten parts of this work together constitute the most comprehensive English-language account yet produced of the intellectual tradition constituted by these three remarkable thinkers. They do not constitute the final word on that tradition: no textbook can be, and this one explicitly does not aspire to be, the final word on thinkers whose significance exceeds the capacity of any single work to fully contain. The editors invite engagement, criticism, correction, and continuation from all those who find in the tradition's intellectual project resources for their own thinking about the questions that matter most for Bangladesh and for the world.

This work is dedicated to the memory of Ahmed Sofa, to the continuing intellectual example of Salimullah Khan, and to the spirit of Abdur Razzaq, who taught a nation to think by refusing to give it easy answers.



Summary of the Book

The book argues that these other things are not only not good but a guarantee and other money that enforces the rules, and that, from probabilities and general, I expectant has profound maxims. Within probabilities and free binding is a general abelian over everything from the log of off factitiousness to the effects of the